IMPRESSIONS

BY PIERRE LOTI

WITH AN

INTRODUCTION

BY HENRY JAMES

UNIV. OF ARIZONA
PQ2472 .A22 mn
Loti, Pierre/Impressions
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[VIAUD]

1st edn (James's mss for pt 2 lost & never reprinted)

E & A B 17ai Secondary binding b.

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ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND CO.
WESTMINSTER MDCCCXCVIII.

BIRMINGHAM:
PRINTED AT THE GUILD PRESS 45 GREAT CHARLES STREEET.

Pierre Loti.

I MAY as well admit at the outset that in speaking of Pierre Loti I give way to an inclination of the irresistible sort, express indeed a lively obligation. I am conscious of owing him that amount and that kind of pleasure as to which hesitation resides only in the difficulty of statement. He has been for me, from the hour of my making his acquaintance, one of the joys of the time, and the fact moreover of his being of the time has often, to my eyes, made it seem to suffer less from the presence of writers less delightful yet more acclaimed. It is a part of the joy I speak of that, having once for all, at the beginning, caused the critical sense thoroughly to vibrate, he has ever since then let it alone, brought about in my mind a state of acceptance, a state of gratitude, in which I have been content not to discriminate. Critically, on first knowing him, I surrendered—for it has always seemed to me that the inner chamber of taste opens only to that key; but, the surrender being complete—the chamber never again

closed—I feel that, like King Amasis with the ring, I have thrown the key into the deep. He is extremely unequal and extremely imperfect. He is familiar with both ends of the scale of taste. I am not sure even that on the whole his talent has gained with experience as much as was to have been expected, that his earlier years have not been those in which he was most to endear himself. But these things have made little difference to a reader so committed to an affection.

It has been a very simple case. At night all cats are grey, and I have liked him so much in general that there has always been a perch, a margin left when the special case has for the moment cut away a little of the ground. The love of letters renders us no greater service—certainly opens to us no greater satisfaction—than in putting us from time to time under some such charm. There need never be a fear, I think, of its doing so too often. When the charm, in such a manner, fixes itself, what has happened is that the effect, the operative gift, has become to us simply a value, and that an experience more or less bitter has taught us never, in literature, to sacrifice any value we may have been fortunate enough to light upon. Such discoveries are too happy, such values too great. They do for us what nothing else does. There are other charms and other surrenders, but those have their action in another air. What the mind feels in any form of magic is a particular extension of the contact with life, and no two forms give us exactly the same. Every artist who really touches us becomes in this way an individual instrument, the fiddler, the improviser of an original tune. The inspiration may sometimes fail, the notes

sound weak or false; but to break, on that account, the fiddle across one's knee is surely—given, as we look about the much-mixed field, the other "values"—a strange æsthetic economy.

I.

I read and relish him whenever he appears, but his earlier things are those to which I most return. It took some time, in those years, quite to make him out—he was so strange a mixture for readers of our tradition. He was a "sailor-man" and yet a poet, a poet and yet a sailor-man. To a marked division of these functions we had always been accustomed, looking as little for sensibility in the seaman as perhaps for seamanship in the man of emotion. So far as we were at all conscious of the uses of sensibility it was not to the British or the American tar that we were in the habit of applying for it. Tobias Smollett, Captain Marryat, Tom Cringle, Fenimore Cooper had taught us another way, and in general our enjoyment of what we artlessly term adventure had not been associated, either as a fact or as an idea, with the privilege of a range of feeling. There was from the first in Loti the experience of the navigator, and yet there was the faculty, the necessity of expression. The experience had doubtless not been prodigious, but it had been at least of a sort that among writers of our race has mostly, for some reason, seemed positively to preclude expression. He introduced confusion, as I have elsewhere had occasion to say, into our assumption, so consecrated by time, that adventures are mainly for those who lack the fiddle-bow and the fiddle-bow all for those condemned

to chamber-music. This was his period of most beautiful production—the period of *Mon Frère Yves*, *Pêcheur d'Islande*, *Fleurs d'Ennui*, *Aziyadé*, *Le Roman d'un Spahi*, *Le Mariage de Loti;* which are not here enumerated in their order of appearance. They presented themselves as the literary recreations—flowers of reminiscence and imagination, not always flowers of lassitude—of a young officer in the navy, a native of Rochefort and of old Huguenot race, whose private name has so completely lost itself in his public that I shall mention him but this once as M. Julien Viaud. They made their full mark only on the publication of *Mon Frère Yves*, but from that moment Loti was placed.

I hasten to add that from that moment also the sea-rover has been less visible in him than the man of expression; without detriment, however, to the immense good fortune of his having betimes, in irresponsible youth, possessed himself of the mystery of the sea. The sense of it and the love of it, with the admirable passion they make, are the background of most of his work, and of all French writers of the day he is the one from whom Paris, with its screen of many folds, least shuts off the rest of the globe. He mentions Paris not even to curse it, and the rest of the globe—but mainly the watery wastes—has been his hunting-ground. It is largely in fact as if he had been kept afloat by the very reasons that conduce to the frequent disembarkment of the Englishman in quest of impressions. He had in these years, as a Frenchman, fewer places to land. When he did land, however, the impressions came thick and are mainly presented in the intensely personal form. They are autobiographic with-

out reserve, for reserve, in spite of his extraordinary faculty of selection and compression, his special genius for summarising, is not his strong point. Whenever Loti landed, in short, he made love, and whenever he made love he appears to have told of it. That would be our main stick to beat him with if his principal use for us had been to inspire us—as I believe it has inspired some readers—with the desire to beat. The limits of that desire on my own part I have sufficiently hinted at, and I feel that I should have had no use of him at all had I not at an early stage arrived at some sort of adequate view of his necessity for "telling." It is the telling, above all, I judge, that is the lion in the path of those whom he displeases. I have never supposed, at any rate, that we can enjoy the special gift of others altogether on terms made by ourselves; it seems to me that when such a gift is real we should take it in any way we can get it—take it and be thankful. Of course—by the most blessed of all laws—we are always free not to take, not even to read, and I dare say that for many persons the non-perusal of reminiscences such as these constitutes a positive pleasure. There are writers, there are voyagers who tell nothing, and for the best of reasons. Loti's singular power to tell is exactly his value, and to attempt to make a law for it might easily be, for readers and critics, a rash adventure. His striking of the notes we delight in may be, for all we know, conditioned on his striking of others we don't. And then—and then: what can one say after all but that we leave him his liberty? Not that we would leave it to everyone. There are sympathies, in short, and impunities; so that I have been careful to make with the

erotics both of *Le Mariage de Loti* and of *Madame Chrysanthème* such terms as would not spoil for me the rest of the message. This rest, in Loti, has always one meaning. It is the part *not* about his love-making.

We are most of all free from care, accordingly, in those of his volumes in which the story he has to tell is the story of someone else—the delightful brother Yves, the magnificent Yann of Brittany, Ramuntcho the bold young Basque, or even the doleful little hero of *Matelot*. It is difficult not to regret that these stories of someone else, all with so special a beauty, are not the most numerous in the list; I would gladly have given for another *Pêcheur d'Islande*, indeed for another *Ramuntcho* or another *Matelot*, a dozen things of the complexion of *L'Exilée*, of *Fantôme d'Orient*, of *Le Roman d'un Enfant*. In *L'Exilée* he "tells" with a vengeance and quite too much; too much, I mean, of what he feels for the troubled, misplaced, accomplished Queen of whose splendid hospitality and confidence the volume is a record: too much also, doubtless, of what he knows of the personal appearance and habits and private affairs—oh, of a delicacy !—of her principal lady-in-waiting. These are Loti's mystifying moments, other specimens of which confront us in the singular publicity given by *Le Livre de la Pitié et de la Mort* to the last illness, the last hours, the laying out and interment of one of the nearest and most loved of his female relatives. Stranger than strange as well, in the pages in question, are the simplicity and solemnity of his expatiation on the favourite cats and other inmates, the domestic arrangements and intimate trifles of the home of his youth. It is odd that a mere matter of shading—for in such things it is only that

—should make so much difference; but these are the errors as to which it may be said not so much that the hand would be stayed in the commission of them by the presence of a sense of humour as that this presence would in general have rendered them insupposable. They proceed after all largely, from one of the most marked features of the French literary mind of the day—that intense professionalism which is in its turn the result of conscious and cultivated art. To work as hard as the countrymen of Loti for the most part work their language—work their perceptions, their emotions and sensibilities, their sense of form, of style, of the shade, the effect, their analysis alike of subject and of tone—to do all this is to thrust the torch assuredly into every corner of experience and to drop every grain of observation into the literary mill.

Nothing, in consequence, is more striking than the failure of any sense—as we ourselves understand it—of a division between the public and the private: the writer becomes primarily a writer and ceases in the same proportion to be anything else. His soul, his life and its pulsations are mere wheels and springs in the machinery of expression, and the man, as a man, can treat himself to no distinctive experience, reserve no garden-plot for wasteful human use. There are precious kinds of silence that he ceases to be able to afford, luxuries of simple choice, happy failures of logic, for ever banished from his budget. Full of suggestion on this head, for instance, is the manner in which the brothers Goncourt live, in their extraordinary *Journal*, up to the last penny of that part of their income which might have been supposed to be most peculiarly personal; paying it out, on the spot, without, as one may

say, so much as passing it through their moral bank. The French writer, on the other hand—I speak most, of course, of the creators, as we perhaps a trifle fatuously call them—can afford an expenditure of expression, particularly in prose, that causes his English-speaking brother to appear by contrast to carry on a very small business. The literary establishment of the latter is indeed in comparison but meagrely mounted. Such is far from the case with Loti's, which offers perhaps, through the peculiar profusion of the personal note, as striking an example as can be named of the rattling spiritual *train de maison* to which I allude. I am lost in admiration of such an economy; wonderstruck, as I reflect, as I measure it, at his employment of his means. Three fourths of his work are the most charming egotism; the portion that is finest, the four or five more or less constructed and conducted tales, is the minor portion. And yet the egotism lives and blooms too, scatters the rarest fragrance and throws out pages like great strange flowers. It all comes from the fact that he uses all his impressions. There are many impressions he never has, but he gives us for all they are worth those with which he is favoured—never misses them on the wing nor shirks the catching; and of the lightest, loosest yet cunningest interweaving of these his curious prose mainly consists. It consists of the happiest conceivable utterance of feelings about aspects. What he may well have assured himself at the start was of his probably being one of the persons in the world to whom aspects had most to say. Wonderful and beautiful is the language in which they speak to him, and that language, as he has reported it, has made his literary fortune. Know-

ledge of the finer, or at any rate the unpersonal sort, reflection of the deeper, the power to compose, in the larger sense, or truly to invent, have had the smallest hand in the business. At the same time he has been subject to the law that nothing in art, however capricious, can be done without love, and he has continually loved two things—one of them the great watery globe and the other the nature of man.

These two things are what, in an exquisite way, both *Pêcheur d'Islande* and *Mon Frère Yves* consist of; the first the simplest, deepest little story of love and death, the other the largest, tenderest, brightest picture of friendship and life. The persons concerned are all sailor-folk, and the setting of the drama—so far as not the great void of the sea-spaces, against which his figures magnificently stand up—is the landscape and colouring, the village scenery of Brittany, for which no one has had so fine and sincere a touch. With however much appreciation any lover of Loti may once have spoken of these books, there can never fail to be a freshness in coming back to them; they belong so to the class of the happiest literary things. And yet, essentially, one must speak of them mainly for old acquaintance—without the power of really naming their charm. The beauty of the author at his best is something too unnameable, something that seems a kind of secret between himself and his reader. That indeed perhaps is what we feel for all the authors who give us the finer joy: we feel it to be quite enough if *they* know what we like them for. When others don't know, that, somehow, at moments, practically adds to the reason. None of the famous "love-stories" of the world are, at

any rate, more charged than this history of Yann and Gaud with the particular exquisite, the mixture of beauty and misery, that we require of the type—which, to commend itself to the right corner of our memory, must always have its final terror and tragedy. Made up of two main forces, human passion, human hope and effort, pain and defeat, and the wonderfully vivified presence of nature in ambush and waiting only to devour, the whole thing hangs together and drives home its effect with an admirable artistic economy. Loti's manner is so all his own—the manner of intimate confidence in his reader, of talk, of anecdote, of sequences neglected and lost, a part of the work obligingly done for him—that quite equally at his best and at his middling he offers the constant interest of a thorough concealment of his means. I can imagine at once no more unqualified success and no model more to be deprecated. The only thing possible was to *be* Loti; let us pray to be protected from any attempt to emulate him by any shorter cut. He offers himself expressly enough as the least literary of writers, and one grants him that without a protest so long as he remains one of the most literary of pleasures. He is of course only what is vulgarly called "deep," and at the very bottom of his depth—like the purse in the consciousness of the pickpocket looking innocently the other way—lies the finest little knowledge of exactly how to do it. A small gold thread, perfectly palpable to himself, guides him through his gaps and breaks, the sweet wild garden of his conspicuous want of plan. This serves him extraordinarily in *Mon Frère Yves*, in which there is so much delightful clearness and so little concatenation. There are times

indeed when we feel him to hold his happy instinct on terms scarcely fair; it does so for him whatever he wants and yet gives, on our part, a positive air of pedantry to all technical inquiries.

What touches deepest in his tales—and indeed in his every page—is, as should be mentioned without delay, the general pity of almost everything. It need hardly be said that he is not of the complexion of the moralist, and the light leading him through the tribulations of his people is as little as possible any reference to what they "had better" have done. We can never at all imagine them to have done anything different, so little can it come up for them to follow anything but their immediate social instincts. When they pay for that only in sorrow or shame, this becomes precisely for ourselves the spring of an added interest. Loti's philosophy is the philosophy of imagination—of likes and dislikes, of indulgence for weakness and compassion for accident, of kindly tolerance for unguarded or unbalanced good faith. His people have come into the world mainly to feel, and he, upon their heels, mainly to feel *for* them. So, with all this, he feels even more than they. That is his most individual note —that he has carried his sensibility, so unquenched and on the whole so little vulgarised, so much about the great globe. The subjects of it in his two earlier novels and in *Matelot* and *Ramuntcho* are the simplest of simple folk, the poorest of the poor. They are all young and fresh and strong, all beautiful and natural, kind and stricken; they earn their living in labour and sorrow, and their joys are the scant breathing-times in the hard battle of life. The humility of their condition is perhaps what most of

all—given the admirable tenderness of his treatment of them—makes us think of Loti as the last of the *raffinés*. It gives the measure of his admirable sense of sociability, gives the natural note to the delicacy of his human tone, to all his heart-softenings and his cultivation of pathos. The strange little tale of *Matelot* is nothing in the world but heart-softening; I call it strange for the simple reason of its being *a priori* so unexpected a stroke on the part of a member of his profession. It depicts the career of a small sensitive sailor-boy who feels everything really too much and in regard to whom we are ourselves, doubtless, in this way—though it is almost brutal to say so—drawn on to participations that are excessive. He dies, of course, in sight of home, of a fever contracted in torrid eastern seas, and the whole affair is but a merciless performance on the finest fiddlestring. Yet the good Lotist, as I may say, can only swallow *Matelot* whole: I should even guage his goodness by his capacity to do so. But if the thing is irresistible it is also calculated, transparent; it unscrews the stopper of tears with a positively audible creak. What then is the reason that its tone is exquisite and its pathos practically profound? I am glad to suppose the answer to such a question to lie beyond my analysis. The reason is where the best reason always is, in the very air of the picture—of which a particular breath, for instance, is in the eloquence, the rare delicacy of presentation, of the episode of the young man's innocent friendship, blighted by fate, with the mild Madeleine of Quebec, the charm of such a passage—Loti at his melancholy happiest—as that in which the author strikes the last note of this adventure. "So it had come to their loving each other

with a tenderness that was equally pure for each. She, ignorant of the things of love and reading her Bible every night; she, destined to keep her useless freshness and youth for a few more springtimes not less pale and then to grow old and fade in the narrowing round of these same streets and these same walls. He, already spoiled with kisses and with other arms, having the world for his changing abode and called to start off perhaps to-morrow, never again to come back—only to leave his body in distant seas."

Fully characteristic of Loti is this mention of his sailor-boy as "spoiled"—spoiled by contacts after all supposedly familiar to sailor-boys. That is but a touch of his usual pessimism, and practically our comment on it as we read consists in not believing it: being spoiled is a process his delightful people are in general so little the worse for. The reason of which, I take it, just brings us close to the general explanation of the author's largest magic, the beauty of his dealings with sun and wind and space. These are the elements with which, whether spoiled or not, his characters mainly live and which he renders for them with a breadth that never fails. They remain somehow, throughout, globe-creatures, with the great arch of the sky for two-thirds of their consciousness, becoming no uglier by anything that may happen to them than birds become by the traps and missles of man. If they were mewed and stewed in close rooms, in dark towns, it might be a different matter. None of them circulate with more ease and grace than Ramuntcho, the hero of his latest tale, expert, in his character of bright young Basque, at Pyreneean tennis, Pyreneean smuggling and climbing, Pyre-

neean love-making, too, not least. If here and there, from book to book, the charm had suffered a chill, in *Ramuntcho* it all comes back—the thing is wholly admirable. And yet what is it?—what that would commend it to readers who like their mouthful of "story" big? Perfect is the bravery of the author's indifference to these and possibly the thing that I most like him for. It is impossible not to admire a man whose general assurance and his faith in his particular star permit him to set sail with so small a provision of plot. The beauty of such an outfit as Loti's is in its positively never leaving him without a subject. Cast ashore on strands the most desert, he is sufficiently nourished by the delicacy of his senses. They play in and out of *Ramuntcho* with the effect of the chequering of the sun in a wood, and our enjoyment of the tale—one can speak at least of one's own—is simply our recognition of the intensity of all the presences. We look into the eyes of the people, we sit with them in the boat, and spring with them on the turf, and racket with them at the game, and sweat with them in the great hot sun, smelling the woods and tasting the wine and hearing the cries—enjoying at every turn the colour and the rustle and the light. We live with their simplicity and we generally love their ways. Above all we love their loves, and there is no one like Loti for making us fond of his lovers. So moments and pictures stand out for us, all with the freshness of odours, contacts, the tone of white walls and brown interiors caught, in glimpses, as we take our ascent through chestnut-woods. It is all experience and memory, and yet all glamour and grace.

III.

In the volumes, the most numerous, that are simply the record of impressions, of change of place, we come back perpetually to that tremor of the fiddlestring. No other word renders so well the fine vibration in Loti of what he sees and what he makes us see. This fineness is his charming quality and arrived at without affectation or contortion. The spasm of the descriptive alternates in the case of too many other travellers with mere visual apathy, and our choice is on the whole mainly between those who are without observation and those who are without expression. But to Loti things come with the sun and the wind and the chance of the spot and the moment; his perception is a sensitive plate on which aspects are forever at play. He is the companion, beyond all others, of my own selection, for the simple reason that none other shows me so easily such far and strange things. He has readers, of a certainty, whom he more than consoles for the humdrum nature of their fate; as positively, with this affection for him, it is better to have had no adventures of one's own. It is simpler—and I say so quite without irony—not to have travelled, not to have trodden with heavier feet the ground over which we follow him. It is of the scenes I shall never visit that I like to read descriptions, and nothing, for that matter, would induce me to interfere with any impression happily received from him. The description in fact for the most part only mystifies and irritates when memory is really in possession. I prefer his memory to my own, and am ready to think it no hard rule of life to have had, in my chair, to take so much of the more

wonderful world from a little lemon-covered book. We can only, at the best, be transported, and the author of *Propos d'Exil*, of *Au Maroc*, of *Japoneries d'Automne* delivers us infallibly, by a process of his own, at the right door in the wall. He has not been an explorer and is not of that race, but his perception so penetrates that he has only to take me round the corner to give me the sense of exploring. I have been assured that *Madame Chrysanthème* is as preposterous, as benighted a picture of Japan as if a stranger, disembarking at Liverpool, had confined his acquaintance with England to a few weeks spent in disreputable female society in a vulgar suburb of that city. But the moral of this truth, if a truth it be, would really seem all to the writer's advantage: I should delight in any observer in whom the gift of observation, the sense of appearances, might be such as to make Birkenhead, say, give him, and by his delightful intervention give *me*, a picture so charming and so living. Whether Loti tells us or no what we want is a question that we certainly never put; what we want becomes for the time just whatever he has to tell us. To turn him over again as I write these lines is, none the less, scarcely to know where, for examples, to pick and choose. We always meet side by side, to begin with, specimens of his innocence and specimens of his craft. This collection of *Figures et Choses qui Passaient*, opens with a succession of pages embodying, on the occasion of the death of the baby of his servant, the sort of emotion that we others flatter ourselves we keep—when we have it to keep—veiled and hushed; but it goes on to the admirable *Trois Journées de Guerre*, an impression of the French attack on the Anam forts in the

summer of 1883, which gives the reader exactly the sense of blinking, wondering, perspiring participation in the presence of endless queerness—the sense of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling the whole hot, grotesque little horror. No one approaches Loti for reconstituting such an episode as this—and in the most off-hand, jotted, anecdotic way—as a presented personal impression. Such notes are doubtless journalism, but journalism exquisite. "In the midst of the morning light, which was fresh and blue, these flames" (a village was on fire) "were of an extraordinary red; they cast no light, but were as dark as blood. You saw them twisted and mixing, saw everything instantly consumed; the smoke-clouds, intensely black, diffused a sharp musty stench. On the roofs of the pagodas, in the midst of their devilries, among the darts of all the forked tails and outspread claws, the rush of the fire-tongues seemed at first natural enough. But all the little plaster monsters had begun to crackle and burst, scattering to right and left the blue porcelain of their scales and the crystal balls of their wicked eyes, then had crumbled, with the beams, into the gaping holes of the temples."

Loti's East is, throughout, of all Easts the most beguiling, though, for the most part—unless perhaps in the case of *Au Maroc*, where he appears to have been peculiarly initiated—it seldom ceases to be the usual, accessible East, the East of Cook, of tickets and time-tables, of the English and American swarm. The swarm, at any rate, never taints Loti's air, and we remain, in his caravan, as disconnected from everything else as it need occur to us to desire. If he has been only where they all have been, he has at least brought back what they all have not, what

indeed, for my imagination, n otheodhsa ronnee—the fine, strange flower of the thing, the element that continues to haunt us, the sweetest, saddest secret it whispers to the mind. When the innumerable others—further pushers, doubtless, and sharper penetrators—shall offer us notes of this quality, then, only then, shall we grant that they have been as far. It would of course never be easy to find in any caravan a pilgrim with so absolute an esteem for his own emotions. Loti belongs to the precious few who are not afraid of being ridiculous; a condition not in itself perhaps constituting positive wealth, but speedily raised to that value when the naught in question is on the right side of certain other figures. His attitude is that whatever, on the spot and in the connection, he may happen to feel is suggestive, interesting and human, so that his duty with regard to it can only be essentially to utter it. The duty of not being ridiculous is one to which too many travellers of our own race assign the high position that he attributes to right expression, to right expression alone. It has led him, this gallant point of honour, to say, at Jerusalem—in the volume with that title—too many things about himself, even to appear indeed to have made the wondrous pilgrimage too much in search of a presentable figure which is not quite the one we might have guessed. Yet here too his sympathetic "self" still includes a more sensible vision of a hundred other and very different things than many a record—of the type that leaxes us unstirred—accompanied with more precautions. *Jerusalem*, on the other hand, I admit, is a trifle spoiled for the rigid Lotist by being, in all the list, the book that gives out most wandering airs, most echoes already heard,

of "literature." That the author has not been from beginning to end intensely literary let me not for a moment do his prodigious legerdemain the wrong to suggest, for his particular shade of the natural was surely never arrived at without much choosing and comparing. His lightness is the lightness of knowledge and his ease the ease of practice. But he covers his tracks, as I have hinted, consummately; it is the perfect pointing of the watch without, discoverably, the mechanism. In *Jerusalem* we seem a little to hear the tick.

But I have been reading again *Au Maroc*, in which, figuratively as well as literally, there is not the least rumble of wheels. The author here wanders over his subject with a step as independent of the usual literary macadam as the march of his caravan, in the roadless land, found itself perforce of any other; and nothing is more delightful than to keep him company through such a mixture of wondrous matter and incalculable talk. Such a volume as this expresses him at his best, for the special adventure gives most chance to his admirable curiosity, his undiscourageable passion for putting on as many as possible of the queer forms of consciousness encountered in other races and under other skies, of living—though not perhaps for so very long—into conditions exotic and uncomfortable, the inner sense of the strangeness of which he more beguilingly than ever communicates. The inner sense seems to me always to begin where the finest *flair* of most travellers stops, and this exquisite *Au Maroc* is all made up of it. His evocation of the almost unutterable Fez, his description of the days spent there apart from the other members of the mission in which he was included,

his picture, perhaps even more, of his further push to the gruesome, melancholy Mekiñez—the warm vividness of these things takes on for the fond reader the intensity of some private romance. Loti, in short, becomes thus—to put it only at that, and where his wandering sensibility is concerned—the rarest of tale-tellers. He drinks, in this character, so deep of impressions that places where he has passed are left dry: there are none, I repeat, we pay him the questionable compliment of wishing to visit after him. We are content to go nowhere—which is a much greater tribute. When I say we are content I mean perhaps we are determined, for he leaves us, in a way all his own, with a fear of finding strange things themselves not so true as *he* is true to their surprising essence. Droll, in a manner, yet without injury to their charm, are the pages of his attempt—condemned, one must recognise, to a success mainly superficial—to live a little the life of any corner that happens to strike him as extraordinary and in particular to dress in its draperies; droll perhaps above all his frank delight in these last aids to illusion and very expressive, at all events, of the joy of masquerading as an Oriental that appears to have been from the first his harmless revenge on his having been born a mere Huguenot. This he was not the man to think sufficient. We forgive any millinery that still leaves the standpoint of the painter as free as, for instance, in such a passage as this: "Toward two in the afternoon a halt in some place or other, from which this image remains with me: the perpetual boundless plain, flowered over as never a garden, and alone there, a little way off, our old exhausted Caid down on his knees at prayer. We are in a zone of white

daisies mixed with pink poppies. The old man, close to his end, has an earthen face, a beard as blanched as lichen, a dress of the same freshness of colour as the poppies and daisies around, the kaftan of pink cloth showing through the long white mufflers. His white horse, with its high red saddle, browses beside him and plunges its head into the grass. He himself, half sunk among the flowers, the white and pink flowers that are circled, beneath the deep blue of the summer sky, by the infinite desert of the immense flowery level—he himself, prostrate on the earth in which he will soon be laid, begs for the mercy of Allah with the fervour of prayer given by the feeling of annihilation at hand." That is pure, essential Loti—poetry in observation, felicity in sadness.

Henry James.

The Passing of a Child.

WHAT I am going to write is only for those who have actually stood by some newly-made little grave, covered still perhaps with fresh flowers, and found themselves overwhelmed by the remembrance of a child's eyes that were closed there for ever under the awful earth.

This death of little children—this baffling enigma how it cheats our understanding! Why are they taken, instead of us, who have done our day's work, and who would willingly accept to go? Or rather why did they come, since they were to depart so soon, only to have undergone the iniquitous agony of death? Before their white tombs our reason and our hearts struggle in conflict, rebellious and distressed in darkness and doubt.

The delightful little being whose memory I would endeavour to prolong by speaking of him, was the only son of Sylvestre, an old servant of ours, who had become after ten years of service, almost one of the family.

He had only seen two summers of our earth. His silky hair, yellow as that of a doll, parted in funny little curls, difficult enough to dress. His complexion was like Bengal roses, his features like a child angel's; whilst a little mouth that was always open above a chin slightly receding, gave him an adorable air of *naïveté*. Moreover he was the happiest of babies, absorbed in the new joy of existence, of breathing, of moving, full of life and healthfulness, and round and muscular as a cupid.

But his peculiar charm was in his eyes, great blue eyes, frank and truthful and ever wide with astonishment before all the things of this world.

In Paris, at the hotel, on this grey December morning after my long journey from the north, where I had been without news for several days, I casually open one of the letters in a pile brought me from the *poste-restante* and read: "Yesterday evening at eight o'clock little Roger died in dreadful agony. We are all deeply distressed. Poor Sylvestre is pitiful to see."

At first I turn and walk up and down as one agitated by physical suffering. Then I continue reading, to learn more: croup, it seems, caused his death, taking him in a few hours from amidst the distraught watchers.

I walk up and down again, observing unconsciously the details of every object about me, the hideousness of the room, and kick aside everything in my way, until I can grasp the inexorable reality of what I have just read; and then suddenly a mist rises, I can see nothing, and the tears come.

The idea that little Roger might die had never entered my thoughts. Nor did I realize that he had taken so

large a place in my heart—that little child! I could not believe that I cared so much for him. Besides, can we tell why we are drawn towards some special little being who is nothing to us, rather than to one who may be more closely tied: it is something, perhaps, that steals from their child eyes, something that rises from the little soul, so new and pure, to penetrate ours that is oppressed and gloomy.

In this same pile of letters is a telegram which has been with the others for the last few days, at the *poste restante:* "I am in dreadful trouble. Our little Roger is dead—Sylvestre."

I look at the dates. All this happened two days ago! They will bury him, then, to-night and it is too late. I cannot possibly arrive in time. There is no human way to see his dear little face again, even pale and rigid.

"Roger Couëc," that was the title he gave himself when he was asked "What is your name" (his own abbreviation of his father's name, a Breton one of rough consonants). When he pronounced this Couëc, he was so delightfully comical that we invariably made him repeat it—to think to-day of this little word, to hear it echoing in my mind, sickens me.

Here, in Paris, I ought to stay some time, I had a thousand things to do, so many appointments, friends counting on me for dinner, pressing questions to be settled, none of which seems of any importance now; but I am determined to go. I shall not even trouble to warn them. I shall go home, home. All the same he won't be there, poor little fellow! He will never be there again, our Roger Couëc.

But there is no train I can possibly take till this evening. During the whole desolate day I shall have to wait —wait in this room, or wander about the streets, alone, and miserable, among those who are necessarily indifferent —my being in revolt, exasperated and helpless against the stupid cruelty of Death, who closes the eyes of the young, and mows down children to lay them in his charnel house.

"I am in dreadful trouble. Our little Roger is dead." As the weary hours go by, I keep thinking of his little life, a little life of only two summers, and as each moment passes, there deepens in me the sense that it is over for ever.

Oh! his little voice—I can hear it now, as it would echo through the courtyard of our house when I passed his parents' rooms. He always followed me: "Messieu, Messieu!" (to him Monsieur was my name) and then his little footsteps would patter merrily behind. All that is at an end—shut up in the past!

As I look back, I see him in a certain pink merino frock—his every-day costume at this time of the year—and a white tie, "the *Vallière*," embroidered at each end with a Chinese flower. He generally wore it the wrong way round, the bow at the back, underneath his little yellow curls. Good God, it breaks my heart, and the tears blind me again when I think of that crooked little tie, all in a muddle at the back of his pink frock.

He had an indomitable spirit, this little Roger, and yet he never flew into violent passions, as most children do. If we annoyed him by stopping him from splashing in water, or by taking away from him anything he might break, he would cry desperately, but only from unhappi-

ness: "Is it possible people can be so unjust," he would seem to say, "Is it possible that such awful things can happen to me!" Then we had to give in to him at once, for in these moods he was irresistible. And now one would give days of one's life never to have caused him any little annoyance.

Sometimes, when he thought he had anything very important to do, and was stopped on the way, he would look up with extraordinary seriousness, and silently push aside one's hand to proceed to his business, frowning severely. Cats sometimes affect this droll gravity when they are anxious to be about their affairs, too occupied to take any heed of the most persistent calling.

He had such eyes, this little Roger, eyes hardly of the earth, that habitually laughed with a little confident joy, yet, at furtive moments, would suddenly look over serious. And although everything in him suggested life—the inconsequent happiness of being, of laughter, he had, when one thinks of it, eyes that seemed to question, to implore, to trouble about some unknown to-morrow.

And it is these he chooses, the inexorable, imbecile mower, to throw into his cemetery holes!

On the morrow, the 6th of December, after travelling all night, I arrive at my home in the early morning of a dismal winter day.

I find poor Sylvestre in my room lighting the fire. He says childishly, with a great sob from his breast, "I have lost my little Roger." And here, in the cold room, daylight just creeping through the windows, and a forgotten lamp still alight on the table, he tells me about the end of this little child for whom I weep even as much as he.

So violent, so unexpected is this aggressiveness of death! He was stifled in full life, struggling, wringing his little hands in his suffering. . . "Until the last moment," says Sylvestre, "he held out his arms for me to take him, he clung to me, and tried to raise himself up; he did not want to die."

Whilst listening to these awful details I suddenly think of a scene that took place last summer. One evening they came and told me that little Roger was ill. I went at once to his parents' house, and there I found him on his mother's knees, trembling, his cheeks wet with tears. He closed his little hand over my finger and looked up imploringly. "Would you believe," he seemed to say, "what has happened to me—the fear I had of stifling—if you knew!" There was nothing seriously the matter, a little choking that often happens to babies. But already in his look stirred the consciousness of his own weakness and the anxiety, the agony of feeling so little, so powerless before the menacing darkness he dared not face alone. Remembering that terrible expression I can only imagine too well the look he must have given of supplication and growing terror when he threw out his arms to his father "not wanting to die."

He had such absolute confidence in our protection that it seemed as if we had betrayed the little fellow in allowing this cursed Mower to carry him away. His expression at certain moments, recurring now to my mind so livingly, causes me more emotion than human words can say. And I think that the humbleness of his birth adds I know not what of greater misery to the pain I feel at having lost him. I should certainly have wept less had he been a little prince

"Oh! he was not forgotten," continues Sylvestre. "Every one in the neighbourhood came, and he had so many flowers, so many wreaths! Besides the whole house is in deep mourning for him; we shall never hear his laughter there again, nor the sound of his baby footsteps, nor the dear shrill little voice."

We are silent at breakfast this morning, and Sylvestre, who has resumed his duties for the first time since the child's death, waits on us, his eyes smarting with tears.

All this last summer Roger used to come and assist at our meals when we had them here in the breakfast room. We would hear him trotting along the court-yard between the flower-stands, anxious to be in time, and then he would appear at the door smiling and radiant, hesitating for a moment to ask permission with his eyes before coming in, as if already in his little mind he understood that he had not quite the right. "Yes, come in; come in Roger Couëc." Then he would march in, pretending he was a soldier. Left, right, left, right; and during the whole breakfast he would tumble in and out between his father's legs, considerably upsetting the service.

At dessert he would push himself closer to my little boy (three years his senior, and devoted to him as to his best doll) and become suddenly bold, pouting his lips for the cherry or strawberry he knew he would get.

After breakfast I went to the back of the house, to the yard leading to the servants' premises. Into this sunny quarter, one reached by a few steps, I used to go often on the pretext of visiting the greenhouse, but really to see something of Roger Couëc, who was generally roaming about there in a little pink frock and a Chinese silk tie.

As soon as he saw me he would hasten up that I might take him with me; and even on those days when I did not want him, he was irresistible, his little voice calling, his determination to follow me, stumbling as he did on the steps, too high for his little legs, that separated the two courts, and going on all fours at last in a most business-like way in order to get along more quickly. Little being come to life under my roof, just as the swallows do in the spring, and as the roses bud on the old walls; for him these courts overshadowed by green branches represented the world! How inscrutable to us his little notions of life, his little thoughts—buried now in the great abyss!

It is the first evening since my return.

I have just placed the portrait of little Roger above my writing table in a pink and gold frame—pink like his little frock. It is one he gave me himself. Somebody had put it in his hands and told him to take it to "Messieu," and he came with a timid air, and something of a twinkle, to make me a present of his portrait; he knew well enough it was his own portrait. How he clutched it with his tiny hands!

Now Sylvestre brings me his little tie, all washed and ironed, *la Vallière*, that I asked him to give me." I bought it in China when I was a sailor," he explained. I hang the little cravat on the frame of the picture knotted with a sprig of white flowers. The portrait will preserve for some years yet the little angel-face that proved so ephemeral, and that was taken from us so soon. We shall still have something to remind us of that inexpressible child look.

Another day gone.

One dull morning in crossing the back yard, I saw the little pink dress that they had washed, and that was hanging on a cord to dry, the little sleeves dangling: it will become a thing put away, carefully folded, and in future years no one will remember what child used to wear it. Then I went into Sylvestre's, and I saw, arranged on some shelves, those little toys I knew so well: his wooden horse, the big goat he was so fond of, and his gun for playing at soldiers.

There, too, was the album of coloured prints, pictures of birds he was never tired of looking at. Whilst he turned the leaves he would point them out one after another and pronounce their names with a shout. An ostrich seemed to amuse him the most, one can hardly tell why; he would stamp with joy the moment the picture came, and announce "strich" with an air of triumph.

Every little insignificant thing that recalls him now only brings pain.

Towards noon of this same day a brilliant sun breaks through the morning's mist and the heavens are clear. I walk with Sylvestre, who is in deep mourning, across the cemetery. It seems here like April weather.

We find the place where he is laid, our little Roger, no tomb made yet, only the signs of a recent burial. But the newly-turned-up earth, the greasy earth, the awful earth is hidden under a bed of flowers: all the wreaths that followed the light bier, hardly faded yet.

So, it is under there that the little face is hidden for ever.

Another day, and it is the first Sunday since he is no longer here: one of those beautiful winter days, perhaps

the most melancholy of the year, bright with deceptive sunshine, almost like April, but that draw in early to chill dark evenings.

On such afternoons they would dress Roger Couëc in his best frock, his white fur tippet and large hat. His parents would take him out for a walk among the other little children all dressed in their Sunday clothes, proudly conscious that he was invariably the rosiest and prettiest child among the little Sunday decked crowd.

To-day Sylvestre and his wife have gone alone to the cemetery: there, in the wan sunshine, they are busying themselves in arranging the white wreaths that are still fresh on the little grave, on the horrible mould. And now the day draws in miserably cold. It is time to go in, the time they would bring the little fellow home, his cheeks crimson from the wind. This evening they return alone, the first Sunday the father and mother are without their little Roger. They have left him over there, frigid and discoloured under the earth. When they return to the empty room they will no longer hear the shrill little voice and the echoing laugh. The little Sunday frock and hat, put away in the cupboard, will become only relics that time will soon render old-fashioned.

And at last they will accustom themselves to not seeing their little Roger, just as I shall get out of the habit of listening for his footsteps in the yard, or looking up for his sudden appearance at the breakfast-room door.

The day when he fell back in his cradle, inert after having suffered so much, after having desperately implored our help with outstretched arms, he was surely enough on that day mown down for ever, and cast back into the

abyss. . . . The strange union of atoms that formed for a brief moment his little smile and the expression of his eyes, disintegrated and at an end. In our memory, which after all will disintegrate too, his image will soon fade; even in this minute corner of the world where his life of two short years was spent, one will soon forget that he passed; things will go on the same, existence here as elsewhere will continue its way. And in the course of innumerable destinies, in the infinite circles of the ages, his disappearance will be as neglected and forgotten as the death of a swallow, or the fading of a white rose on our walls. And yet how can I express my sense of bitter revolt, my infinite pity, at the thought of the vain supplication of that last look so full of terror at the approach of his end. How can I speak of the pain I feel, with the added agony of thinking that the dead child will not even know of it! . . .

Easter Holidays.

IN those days every month seemed endless, and the years an eternity. Summer time and holidays would last delightfully enough, but the late autumn and winter, poisoned by tasks and punishments, by the cold and rain, dragged along with lamentable slowness.

The year of which I am going to speak, here was, I think, the twelfth I had seen on this earth of ours. I spent it, alas! under the rod of "the Great Black Ape," professor of literature at the college I had entered with no particular distinction; and it has left an impression on me that, even to this day, remains painful, however lightly I turn my thoughts to it.

I can remember, as though it were yesterday, the profound melancholy of that October day, the last of the holidays, and the eve of the dreaded return to school. I had come back that very morning from spending a free delightful summer in the South and the sunshine with some cousins, and my head was still full of all that I had seen and done there: the gathering of the grapes among the reddening vines, the climbing up through the oak woods to the

quaint old manors perched aloft on the heights, the unpremeditated rambles with a troop of little followers of whom I was the undisputed leader. . . What a change to come home only to see the summer die, and to take up on the morrow the miserable routine of things.

Surely enough, on that day, a chill swept through the air under a suddenly clouded heaven, bringing with it all the sadness of autumn which I resented in my childhood with inexplicable intensity. Moreover there was "the Great Black Ape" (Monsieur Cracheux) whom I must face in a few hours. I knew him by sight, having often seen him as I passed the dreary college gates with my nurse. For a year now I had scented him out and dreaded him, and my peculiar disgust for his person aggravated my sense of terror at the inevitable "going in." This last day I spent first in filling my little museum with the different precious specimens that I had brought back from my walks in the South: wondrous butterflies caught in the hay, and astonishing fossils discovered in the natural grottoes and valleys. And then alone in my room I sat down at my desk—where on the morrow alas! I should have to begin to work—and undertook a task which kept me busy till dusk: the making of a calendar after my own fashion, from which I could tear off a page every evening. Ten little packets to be prepared of thirty leaflets each, for ten school months, the dates and the days marked, Thursdays and Sundays written with special elaboration on pink paper.

Whilst I was arranging this, out from the foggy street rose the plaintive cries of the wandering chimney sweeps, who came always in Autumn time, like the knell of the

summer days: "Chimneys to sweep!" The lugubrious chant filled my heart with untold agonies. Still my task went on; I had come to the month of April and to Easter. On pink paper of course that great day, and beautifully written with a garland of flowers encircling it. On pink paper, too, the following days, ten days of vacation—a delightful truce to the hostilities of "the Great Ape."

When it was finished, I opened my cupboard of toys to nail up my ten months in a row on the edge of the shelf, beginning with this dire October.

In nailing the month of April I looked at the pink bundle that marked the Easter holidays, and thought with despair, will it ever come? And in an imaginary future I saw myself tearing down those leaves at the end of each day that would grow milder and longer till the Spring would be in the air.

Then came the month of May. When I get there, I said to myself, at the hour to tear, it will be quite light and the sky golden from a setting sun, and I shall hear in the street the young women and sailors dancing, and singing roundels of May, under the garlands hung above them on the windows.

Then June and the flowers, and the fruit, and the sunshine—then July—the coming at last of the long holidays and the intoxicating departure for a visit to our cousins in the South.

How immeasurably distant those future times appeared to be!

II.

The yoke of the Great Black Ape was truly terrible—

beyond my worst forebodings. What a sad and weary winter it was, my hands always stained with ink, my task never finished, and naturally a conscience that was never at rest. Even on Thursdays and Sundays this old man, who had no bowels of compassion, overwhelmed us. To amuse my little fellow-sufferers I painted on my copy-books, which we secretly passed round, huge black apes in various attitudes—poring over classic works, or scratching themselves.

In these days the race of the Great Black Ape is dying out, though a few still remain in the heart of the provinces, and I should like to rouse those unhappy little fellows, who are slow at their work, and at the bottom of the class, to revolt against the trash that is forced upon them to the ruin of their bodies and minds alike.

For all this, Easter did approach, and soon the last leaflets that covered the longed-for little batch of pink would be thrown to the winds.

But Easter was very early that year and Spring a sorry laggard.

A terrible fear that the days on the pink paper would be days of rain and wintry weather took hold of me.

Palm Sunday went by with hardly a gleam of sunshine. Then Good Friday, a sad grey day, the guns at the naval station booming every half-hour to remind the world of the death of Christ.

And Saturday came, gloomy too, but bringing with it the end of the Great Ape's rule—and liberty!

The last class was just at an end—only one more quarter of an hour! I could hardly keep my seat!

Careful to the last, I wrote a hasty good-bye to André

between the leaves of my blotter. He was the eldest and most grown-up of us all, and that year had shown some liking for me, perhaps because I was the youngest, and something still of a baby. (We only saw one another in class as he was a boarder and I a day-scholar, and then the Great Ape had had the meanness to put us at opposite ends of the room, under the pretext that we talked too much, which obliged us to write to one another the whole time in an Egyptian code on paper stamped with a monkey in Chinese ink, the seal of our slavery.)

There was only a quarter of an hour before the general sigh of relief; my feet tingled to be up, and my legs itched to make for the window.

"Now boys," suddenly said the Great Ape, "take down the holiday task that you must bring me on Wednesday week when the class will re-assemble."

A holiday task! We were betrayed! What a pitiless brute he was!

We all looked at one another, some in consternation, others furious and indignant.

It was a Latin composition! And I who could not even write French, and fell short in all the Great Ape's subjects!

I wrote it down, brimming over with rage the while, badly and untidily on purpose.

Moreover his subject was absurd. "In a great scented garden through which the Spring breeze softly blew, a rash child, heedless of his tutor's warning, amused himself by teazing the bees who were sucking honey from the freshly-opened flowers." (From time to time there were dots to mark the places we were to fill in at our own discretion.) "At last this disobedient child succeeded in

trapping one of these interesting workers in the cup of a campanula with his finger and thumb. And the infuriated insect," dictated the old man, "and the infuriated insect, began to struggle (notice the infinitive of movement), and to sting the fingers of his cowardly persecutor. This, boys, is the moral. A full stop, that's all."

On my way home I kept repeating to myself the phrase "the infuriated insect," which, I don't know why, particularly exasperated me. And to the title of the Black Ape I added, as I ground my teeth with rage, "Dirty old sparrow!"

Everything in this world of ours is a matter of custom and convention, and this "dirty sparrow" in our school slang expressed a completely overwhelming insult.

On Easter Sunday the church bells pealed out. From early morning the streets were filled with moving crowds of people in their best clothes. Following the old custom, the good folk had decked themselves out in light clothes and straw hats. But the heavens were still clouded and the sun sulking.

It was sad to see them all in their Spring garments hurrying along with frozen looks, and their heads bent against the bitter north wind.

Surely Spring should not disappoint children who have awaited it with such confidence and fervour during the three interminable months of winter.

From the morrow it was arranged that I should work at my holiday task for an hour a day, with the idea that in two or three days it would be finished, my hands washed of it and my heart free.

Patiently enough I kept to my room the whole ap-

pointed time, my elbows on the desk and my fingers covered with ink, but nothing would come: "And the infuriated insect began to struggle." Inspiration failed me, my thoughts would wonder; I was dreaming of the Spring that would not appear, and longing to run outside, for all the rain and wind.

And my heart sickened as I realized that the days, those precious days written on the pink paper, were slipping inevitably by—cheerlessly, miserably.

III.

The holidays were flying—each day the same cold rain, each day the same dark skies. There were only four more. On Friday my little friend, Jeanne, came with her mother to invite me to spend the day with her in a garden which belonged to them outside the town. What an unexpected joy! And the weather was actually clearing after the torrent of rain, clouded at moments only, then bright with sunshine.

After the week's confinement to the house, because of the wet, it seemed wonderful to find the Spring at last. I had even doubted its existence, but it was there all the same, blooming in profusion; the pink hyacinths, anemones so red, anemones so purple, and tufts of the common gilly-flower, glorious golden yellow, striped with brown. How brilliant they were, nodding their heads under the uncertain skys, where great clouds swept past still laden with winter greyness. And a sense of mysterious delight stole over me in the presence of all these flowers, in spite of the gusts of wind and the threatening rain.

On my homeward way I grew sad—the day was over

and the unfinished Latin task hung over my head for the morrow—the abominable infuriated insect. I whispered a suggestion to my little friend that she should come and fetch me again before the term began, which she promised to do.

IV.

Oh, miserable me ! This evening the last of the pink papers must be torn off.

There I was, after breakfast, pouring over the Latin composition, hardly further advanced than on the Easter Monday, when I heard that little Jeanne was waiting for me downstairs to take me to her garden in the suburbs. But my father came up, looked with consternation at my copy-book and refused to let me go. "He must finish his composition first," said he, "and then he can join her." Heavens ! and it was the last day.

The thought of missing this one chance of spending the afternoon with Jeanne in the great garden, filled me with absolute despair.

I set to my subject with rage. I introduced breezes and butterflies, crimson roses and flowers of punic red; then I came to the phrase which was almost at the end, "And the infuriated insect. . ." *Began to struggle*, in my big Latin dictionary was translated: *Jactare corpus* (to throw the body from side to side). As the expression seemed to me rather strong for a bee I added to *corpus* the ingenious epithet *tenue*, (tiny,) and to keep the insidious infinitive of movement I wrote: *tenue corpus jactare furens.*

There ! it was finished ! Now quick for my nurse to take me to the garden, for to my great humiliation I was

not considered old enough to go out alone. In great haste I washed my hands, inky up to the elbow, and dressed ready to start for the garden where Jeanne would be waiting for me among the golden gilly-flowers and the red anemones. Quick, quick, quick, for it was late and the sun was setting—the sun of my last day !

Alas ! as we went through the town gates, there in the avenue of young elms that led to the suburbs I saw Jeanne —Jeanne coming back with her mother.

" So this is the time you come," she said with a little tone of irony. " We are just going home."

Then in the chill of the day that was drawing to its close, I knew that for a whole year I could not be with the Spring in this great garden with its grey walls, and its tender early flowers, so vivid and brilliant under the changing sky. A devastating sense of regret took possession of me, one of those strange and inexplicable fits of melancholy with which my whole childhood was tinged, especially at those hours of the evening when the shadows were lengthening.

V.

Next morning we sat with mournful faces on rows of benches, whilst the Great Ape read aloud our Easter productions.

My turn came to be read aloud by him. And who would have thought it; I had evidently succeeded in doing well. Even when he came to the phrase, *Tenue corpus jactare furens*, he exclaimed in a shrill grotesque little voice, " Oh, that's excellent !"

Well that was too much ! To have done something that pleased the Old Ape !

Covered with confusion, I sought the eyes of my friend André, full of anxiety to learn what he would think of me. He made a grimace from the distance, lowering his head and protruding his lips to make me feel ashamed.

He seemed to mock me, but his smile was kind and affectionate withal; I saw he did not think too badly of me for having done anything so good, and I felt a little consoled.

A Reflective Moment.

THERE are moments, rare as they are peculiar, when the true character of a country suddenly frees itself from the uniform commonplace of an every-day world, and a soul seems to rise from the very soil, to steal from the trees, and from out a thousand things: the bygone spirit of the race that slept numbed by the great universal medley, for a moment waking.

To-day, the 22nd of November, at the extreme point where France ends, as I sit alone on my terrace that actually overlooks Spain, the spirit of the Basque Country appears to me for the first time. Our European countries, alas! grow more and more like one another. Thus I had lived for a year in this *Euscalerria* without having discovered anything very peculiar, and without having become in any way aware that I was growing attached to it.

But doubtless a gradual working within me has taken place, a slow penetrating of the Basque effluvium that has insensibly prepared me to understand her and to love her.

To-day is the feast of the Perpetual Adoration, and the

churches, Spanish as well as French, are fuller than ever of burning tapers and simple souls that pray. It is gloriously fine; on the Bidassoa, on the Pyrenees, over the sea, reigns the same infinite calm. The still air is warm as in May, yet with the indefinable melancholy of late Autumn —sign in itself of the waning year. The sea in the distance glitters as a band of blue mother-of-pearl. There are southern, almost African tints on the mountains which are clearly outlined against the sky, though vaporous, and bathed in all that is diaphanous and golden. The Bidassoa, at my feet, sluggish and smooth, reflects, with the accuracy of a mirror, Fontarabia opposite—its church, its strong castle scorched by a hundred summers, the arid mountains beyond with their smallest ruts and faintest shadows, even their tiniest cottages scattered about white on the great red foundations, all delightfully inverted. High up in the air or down in the depths of the deceptive mirror the most distant summits are equally pure. The immobility of everything, the luminous brilliancy of the tints give these Spanish hills something of the sadness of Morocco; to-day, especially, one feels that Africa is quite close—as though the clearness of the atmosphere, that lessened visible distance, had also had the power to bring it nearer us.

And this great calm silence over everything—this unchanging stillness of the air, these motionless lights and great shadows, give me at first the impression of a pause in the dizzy movement of centuries, of a reflectiveness, an immense waiting, or rather a look of melancholy thrown back on a past anterior to suns and human beings, races and religions

And, in the great spaces for sound ring the old bells of the churches, calling men the better, in the strange hushes, to their dead worships, Fontarabia, Hendaye, the convents of Monks ring, ring, send out their summons with the same note of age, the same old voices as in centuries gone.

On the Bidassoa, boats pass slowly from shore to shore, forming long lines of sleepy ripples that blur the inverted picture of Fontarabia and the brown mountains. The sailors on board, rugged-faced, wearing the traditional black cap, and beardless according to the Basque custom, talk together in a tongue that is thousands of years old, or sing, in a nasal falsetto, their old ancestral airs.

And on the surrounding paths, all flowering again in this marvellous Autumn time, between the hedges, hedges covered as in Spring with wild roses, privet and honeysuckle, are women and young girls on their way from onechurch to another, dressed mostly in black, a thick black mantilla falling over their foreheads, the costume habitually worn by those who go to pray, either for themselves or for the dead laid under the earth in the cemetries.

Then suddenly as I stand before this scene—listening still to the clanking of the old bells, or the snatches of song that resound from the distance, I become aware of all that this country has preserved of peculiar and distinctive, down to its very depths. I feel for the first time stealing up everywhere an atmosphere of separateness, as it were, from the rest of the world, of mystery—a living essence of what the place is—destructible alas! but still impregnating all things, exhaling from all things—surely the dying soul of the Basque country.

And yet in the distance comes a hideous thing, noisy, black, tearing past with idiotic speed, shaking the ground, and disturbing the delightful calm by whistles and rattling iron: the train—the railway, a mightier leveller than time, distributing the base fabrics of industry, propagating modern ideas, disgorging daily here as elsewhere the common-place, and stupid.

At Loyola.

TOWARDS evening, as the sun is setting, the express from Saint Sebastian to Madrid puts us down at a town called Zumarraga, where my Basque companion and myself are obliged to wait an hour for the carriage that is to take us on to Ignace.

The mildness of a Southern Autumn is in the air, but everywhere dead leaves are falling. This waiting on an October evening about an isolated little town surrounded by high mountains, and where the people only speak an incomprehensible language is inevitably depressing. We stroll about aimlessly. In a window in one of the dark narrow streets a solitary parrot talks to itself.

"I am sure he speaks Basque too," I say to my companion.

"Most likely," he answers, and listens. "Yes, he actually does, he continues with a laugh. "I can hear him saying Jacquo ederra (Pretty Jacquo)."

For the tenth time we find ourselves in front of the Church which stands in a great square surrounded by old

ruined houses with projecting roofs, and carved balconies, and emblazoned walls. It forms one side of the Square, and is built of a reddish brown stone, weather-worn and cracked in places; and beyond (of the same red stone) rise the mountains into evening light. In the centre of the Square is a fountain to which young peasants come for water. There is also a new monument of white marble gleaming in relief against the shadowy surroundings: a statue of an old man with the brow of a visionary, holding in his hands a guitar, yarraguire, a wandering musician, composer of patriotic hymns, seditious enough, and love songs. An inscription in that ancient language that can never really be understood by strangers, informs the world that the Basques have honoured the last of their bards. These Euscarrien people, still distinctive, still entirely themselves, have in truth neither been successfully assimilated on the one side by France nor on the other by Spain.

In the distance the shrill notes of a flute break on the air, accompanied by a tambourine at intervals, peculiarly Arabian in its abrupt time. They draw near, and a wedding party appears—a very humble little wedding party, moving along quickly, all but running to the sound of the music.

Once within the Square, the little procession stops to dance, all among the fallen leaves that scurry about their feet, blown by the wind. They number but fifteen, and just now we are their sole spectators. The bride, who is young and pretty, alone is fashionably dressed, with leg of mutton sleeves and a skirt of 1830, the last caprice of 1892. The tambourine and the flute play a rapid wild air, one of those Basque tunes in five time that upset all our notions

of rhythm; and they start together a most complicated dance interrupted by leaps and cries—an ancient dance, the tradition of which will soon be lost.

Some girls come along with pitchers on their heads to draw water from the fountain; and then the bridegroom, who looks about eighteen, goes towards them and asks them to dance. Children run up, and a few idlers stroll into the Square, so that quite a little assembly is formed to make the wedding of the poor folk less cheerless in this great forlorn place at the approach of night. In the streets, too, the peasants stop their cumbrous waggons drawn by oxen, that roll noisily along on round discs of wood like the wheels of an ancient chariot.

At five o'clock our carriage is brought to us there, ready at last: a kind of cabriolet with a hood of oil-cloth, and drawn by two horses harnessed in tandem, with a considerable number of bells on their necks.

We are almost at once in the country; it grows quite dark, the air as warm as that of a summer night. An hour and a half on the road, at a great pace, across valleys and through gorges, skirting torrents we cannot see, but hear roaring at our feet in spite of bells that jingle all the time, whilst a soft wind from the south scatters dead leaves up to our faces.

We stop at last before the porch of an enormous *fonda*. We have reached our destination. On the other side of the road is the Convent of Saint Ignatius, a black mass rising from out of the darkness, quite solitary; the *Fonda* and the Convent, there is nothing else at Loyola!

The *Fonda* is an old building with staircases one might find in a palace, their balustrades of wrought iron. As

soon as you enter you scent the acid odour of the food, common to all Spanish inns. The good folk within neither understand French nor Spanish, simply the language of the country—Basque. At table there is only an old priest and ourselves; but a short time ago, it seems, when the new General of the Jesuits was called, the great rooms were full of travellers from all parts, even from the furthest end of Poland and Russia.

The *Fonda* is almost a holy place; the walls are hung with sacred pictures, and along the staircases are writings forbidding those who go up and down to swear or to blaspheme.

II.

As I wake at Loyola, long rays of light filtering through the shutters meet my eyes. The large room in which I have slept is white-washed and bare—almost empty, with pictures of saints and holy water vases hung on the walls. All through the night I heard the convent bells tolling, and the roar of a torrent not far distant. This morning it is the voice of one of the *Fonda* servants that wakes me, singing a Basque air in five time on the staircase, an air by that Yparraguire whose statue I saw yesterday in the great forlorn Square at Zumarraga.

I open my windows to let in the streaming sun. It is the glorious morning of a Southern October. If it were not for the red and gold of the trees, for the dead leaves scattered on the grass, one would say this was an August day. The site is unique and admirably chosen: a small unbroken plain, the only one to be found for miles round in this wild corner of the Basque country, a plain as fertile

as a garden, watered by a fresh torrent, and mysteriously shut in, almost roofed in by high rugged mountains that separate it from the rest of the world. The running water makes a murmuring noise in the silence around, and a pastoral calm hovers over the whole of the exquisite region.

Yet in front of me rises the Convent of Saint Ignatius, nest of the Jesuits, throned as sovereign master, immense and superb in this isolated spot: a dark mass of grey masonry, imposing and magnificent, in the midst of this deserted country that has remained so rustic and primitive. The chapel is in the centre of the great façade which forms, as it were, two strange wings: its dome rises in the grand proportions of a basilica; its peristyle stands out in a sumptuous semicircle of marble, the portico and pillars of black marble emblazoned with white; the steps that lead up to it are immense, adorned with lions and statues. And in front nothing but beds of chrysanthemums, peaceful alleys between old-fashioned trellised borders, and oddly enough no enclosing walls or rails—open to the wide country, to the fields and paths where the peasants may go to and fro.

Gloomy thoughts associate themselves with this nest of Jesuitism and of the Inquisition: looking at this convent of Loyola, whose very name savours of oppression, one cannot help thinking of the cruel and implacable things that were formerly decreed in lowered voices behind these walls, and then executed close by or far away, always pitilessly and in the dark. This huge and opulent edifice, with its heavy architecture, its dominating air, hidden in these mountains, has all the physiognomy that expresses

the great Jesuitical idea. Yet the confidence implied in the surroundings, these gardens open to everyone, these flowers unprotected even by a hedge, give an unexpected air of hospitality. The rule of this order is certainly the most astonishing deformation of Christianity that has ever issued from the human brain, and just as there is a persistent gentleness, in spite of all things, a sweetness surrounding the name of Jesus, so this word Jesuit, which is derived from it, remains always disturbing and cold and hard.

In the midst actually of the trellised pathways labourers go to and fro. Waggons, on wheels of massive wood, in the Roman fashion, that make a peculiar groaning sound as they roll—a sound one hears on every road in the Basque country—are filled to overflowing with red and golden cider apples that leave a train of scent on the mild air, and are led by peasants who sing old world songs as they pass the high windows, with no attempt at constraint. In fact a profound security surrounds the great *Jesuitière*, an air impregnated with only peace and abundance.

We leave the *Fonda* to go out into the sunshine and walk in the grounds of the gloomy convent. One of the doors before us suddenly opens, evidently the door of the school, for about thirty little boys scamper out, jumping and shouting, whilst an old fellow, in the black gown of the order, hastens to close the shutters on the first floor above their heads, that they may safely play the traditional Basque game of ball against the walls, without risk of breaking the windows. They play for a little while, their childish merriment echoing delightfully among the sombre walls. Then they gradually disperse about the country, and all is silence again—the great silence of the fields—no

one passes now. As the approach of noon, the sun pours down with greater and greater force upon the beds of chrysanthemums and the stately staircase of marble.

As I go up to the Chapel by these steps, admiring the sumptuous porticoes, the incomparable site, and the wonderful blue sky, I experience a strange sense of instinctive repulsion—something of an old Hugenot rancour against this Society of Jesus. Not that I give credence to all the accusations of wrong doing and evil certain hot-heads have hurled against it—and, besides, what do its crimes signify? A human institution should only be judged by the amount of enthusiasm it has aroused in the hearts of men, by the amount of consolation or soothing illusion it has been able to give to the world. But this Society of Jesus, which only knows how to annihilate all whom it allures to its embrace, that is based on a savage impersonality, awful, too, in its almost boundless power and mysterious proceedings, disquiets and confuses me.

The great doors of the Chapel, profusely sculptured from top to bottom, and decorated with brass ornaments, are so well polished and varnished, that, in spite of their age, they are as bright as though they were new. In no other church are doors kept with such care. They at once give an impression of wealth, of *persistence* and *durability*. No one is there. We try gently to push one of the sculptured doors, which gives and opens, there seems to be nothing to keep them closed. And then the splendour breaks upon us.

An immense round church. In the centre a circular colonnade, massive and strong, of marble that is almost black, relieved by very fine threads of gold, supports

a dome of a lighter colour, all of grey and pink marble. This dome is decorated with a series of gigantic slabs of marble, grey and gold, ranged in a circle. Each of these slabs rests on a regal drapery, also of marble, that appears to fall in folds, their outside edges of the palest rose coloured marble, the inside, the lining as it were, of a brighter shade, the whole having the lustre of porcelain. And over each of the black columns that support the pink roof, a white statue stands in relief against the folds of the beautiful drapery; quite a company of these personages up there, all of a snowy whiteness arranged circular-wise in attitudes of thought and prayer. At the further end of the church, facing the entrance, is the marvellous sanctuary, the high Altar made entirely of brown agate inlaid with rare stones of different colours, among which white predominates. About these great columns of twisted agate, prodigious mosaics entwine like spirals of riband, the whole so exquisitely polished that it gleams like the inside of a sea shell. In the centre stands a life-sized statue of St. Ignatius in chiselled and embossed silver. About the central rotunda, in the aisles of brown and grey marble, the different secondary altars are ornamented with statues, nearly all of which are remarkable, and whose gilded draperies have that peculiar sheen that gold takes on marble. Nowhere is there any excess of decoration, actually a severe soberness in all the magnificence; everywhere the natural tints and gleam of marble; gold used only on the robes of the saints with extreme discretion, in fine threads and light embroideries, bright rich glittering gold.

The whole place is maintained with a freshness that is

almost new, nevertheless one divines the age of things beneath. Every detail here is bright, and without trace of dust, even to the resounding flag-stones under our feet. There is not another church in the world that is so perfectly kept, and this excessive care is in itself a measure of the Society's wealth.

Still nobody about. We entered without anyone noticing us, by a door that is always open. The sudden apparition of such a place on emerging from the surrounding hills, the quiet of the morning, this silence amidst a splendour that seems hardly religious, makes one dream of enchanted palaces that, at the touch of a magic wand, might vanish.

Altogether, from a human point of view, I find this magnificence of convents and churches that have swallowed the fortunes of thousands of different people, and which are so impersonal, affording to their creators even, no more joy than to the casual traveller who hundreds of years afterwards happens to pass by, strange and inexplicable.

After the Chapel, we desire to see the interior of the convent, and return therefore to the walks of chrysanthemums. We ask some peasants what we should do, where to knock, which door to go in by.

"Oh!" they say, "by which ever you like; all the doors are right, for one is allowed to go everywhere."

And they push the first door we come upon which opens wide before us. Rather hesitatingly, and again without meeting anyone, we go up to the second floor, and suddenly find ourselves in a room like a small Asiatic pagoda, or a fairy's chamber. Extraordinarily low in the ceiling,

it has enormous beams that one can touch with one's hand, each one of which is a garland of acanthus leaves profusely gilded. These beams, that are repeated throughout the whole length of the room, all equally magnificent in their extravagant excess of decoration, form together a kind of tunnel of golden foliage. The room is divided by a gilded grill beyond which two sacred lamps, with globes like pink flowers, burn before the golden reliquaries. All is bright with that inimitable soft tone of the heavy gilding habitually used in former times, and a delicious odour of incense fills the air. However, a tiny grill opens in a door, and a pair of eyes look at us; then the door opens, and a young man between eighteen and twenty years of age, with a cheery face, wearing the black gown of the Jesuit and carrying a feather brush under his arm, and a broom in his hand, smilingly beckons us to go in. He is in a sumptuous old room hung with red brocade, and scattered with gilded furniture and tables of marble marquetrie, busy dusting some reliquaries. He asks us if we are French. My companion, who thinks he recognises in him a man of his own race, answers in the Basque language.

"Why, yes," responds the brother, "you are French, but French Euscualdunac!" (French Basques).

His words seem to suggest: "therefore you are scarcely French! Say rather that we are compatriots!" and he becomes more genial than ever. He explains to us that this is the room of Ignatius Loyola, and that it is confided to his care. These bones now encrusted with precious stones, and these stuffs that fill the reliquaries, are the remains of the person and the garments of the great saint.

If we wish to visit the Convent, he tells us, with the same expressive confidence that seems here to be in the very air, we have only to go down to the ground floor, turn to the right then to the left and knock at the second door, there we shall find some fathers who will be delighted to show us round. So we go and knock at the prescribed door. A brother porter, after looking at us, smiling, too, like the Basque brother upstairs, shows us into a large airy parlour. Of course, he says, we shall be shown round wherever we wish to go. A French father shall even be chosen for our guide, if we will have the goodness to sit down and wait a moment. It would be impossible to wish for a more hospitable house, or for more agreeable hosts.

Soon the father, who is to take us round, arrives with outstretched hand. His expression is kind and frank; he looks me straight in the face; nothing of what is called the Jesuitical air in his manner. He is cordial, affable and gay. The Convent, we wander through, is immense, a very labryinth in which, he tells us, young novices often lose their way. With its white walls and in its bareness, it resembles any other convent. The interminable corridors have little cells on each side that look out into the quiet country; over the door of each of these is written the name of the father who inhabits it. There are many French names, some English and some Russian: the Society of Jesus extends its unseen hand everywhere.

But the wonder of the place is the old feudal castle of St. Ignatius, which chance led us to enter first. It is one of those little vulture's nests of the Spanish Middle Ages, with archaic walls made of stone and of red brick curi-

ously intermingled. It is enclosed, set as a precious stone in the great formidable convent sprung from it. So religiously is it respected, that in the rooms adjoining it, whatever their decoration may be, the wall that forms part of the castle is left bare in the rough stone. Its extreme age makes the buildings that surround it, in themselves old enough, appear almost new, and its smallness seems the more astonishing in the midst of the gigantic proportions of the monastery, resembling indeed a toy castle built in former days for children. Sacred lamps and perfumes burn throughout, day and night. The Jesuits, who have succeeded each other these four centuries, have made it a sacred duty to decorate it from top to bottom. There are altars and gildings even in its little stables. The room with the roof of golden foliage like a pagoda, which we saw on arriving, is the ancient reception room of the castle, no doubt quite modest in former days, now, out of respect, the old beams are covered in all this wealth, as a relic might be put in a golden shrine.

Loyola is situated between two little old Basque towns near one another, Aspeïtia and Ascoïtia, typical old places, doubtless unchanged since their construction—sombre houses with diminutive shops and small industries. Both have churches, blest, like that of Loyola, by the terrestial visits of St. Ignatius, and rich in decoration to an extent unusual even in Spain. At Aspeïtia, behind the high altar, from the pavement to the roof, there is a mass of golden foliage deeply carved in wood that must have cost infinite patience to accomplish.

The chief industry of both these towns, bathed now in a fierce Autumn sun, appears to be the manufacture of

alpargates (boots with cloth tops) and of *avarcac* (Basque boots made of sheepskin that fasten in the old-fashioned way with a lacing up the calf of the leg).

At Ascoïtia especially, the streets are lined with boot-makers, working in feverish haste, as if an unshod world were anxiously waiting for the completion of their *alpargates*. These good people sew and tap in a kind of frenzy, and the string soles pile up about them in little mountains.

The same carriage, that brought us here in the dark yesterday, takes us back to Zumarraga to-day in the hot sunshine. We pass a great many heavy waggons drawn by oxen, and full of scented apples, lumbering slowly along on their massive wheels. Our horses, covered with bells, galop over beds of dead leaves, through wondrous little valleys, by the side of cool torrents we only heard on our nocturnal journey.

The Mayor of the Sea.

THE great solemn room in the Town Hall of Fontarabia, dilapidated and empty, bears witness, as does the whole town here, to a bygone magnificence. At the further end of the hall, under a sort of daïs of old brocade, there is a portrait of the Queen Regent, and along the walls, benches and arm-chairs are ranged.

We are three or four waiting. The shutters are closed because of the flies, leaving us almost in darkness. "In a minute," says the Alcalde (the mayor of the town) "when the vespers are over, they will come."

We hear the sound of a Basque flute, plaintive and strange as Arab music, rising from the silence without. It is stiflingly hot, and, in spite of the darkness in the room, one is conscious that the great July sun is flaming in the heavens, burning down on this mass of old wood and stones which make up Fontarabia.

We go out on to the old balcony of forged iron to see if they are coming. Below us is the "Calle Major," a

narrow street impenetrable by the sun, enclosed between houses dating back to the middle ages. It is on a steep incline ending down below in a ruined gate, and apparently closed at the top—walled in by the dark mass of the church. A veritable scene from old Spain—a little bit that has remained extraordinarily intact—roofs with sculptured beams projecting to afford shade, magnificent emblazonries in relief on the walls of reddish stone; balconies of forged iron, one above the other, decorated with pots of flowers, and brightened everywhere by geraniums and carnations. Spanish heads appear at the windows, and look towards the church, waiting for the procession that is coming. Curiosity begins to animate the dead street. The bells suddenly ring, the very vibrations reach us, and fill the calm hot air: vespers are over.

The people come out of the dark old houses, they lean over the balconies and fill up the door-ways. Service being over, five or six priests, suave and kind in appearance, join us in the hall and greet us.

At last the drum is heard in the distance. *They* are coming.

At the top of the street, from the turning which seems to end it, a procession emerges. One by one the men appear in front of the old church wall that forms the great background of this picture. First the musicians, in red caps, playing a quick lively march. Behind them a woman who seems to be the principal person in the procession, a woman draped in pure white, tall and perfectly proportioned, with the movements of a goddess. She advances rapidly, almost dancing in time to the music, a large coffer on her head, which she holds with upraised

arms, like the rounded handles of a Greek vase. After her comes a boy carrying a great red banner embroidered with a blue escutcheon. Then a group of bronzed faces wearing the traditional Basque cap: the fishermen—all the brotherhood of Fontarabia—come from the seamen's quarter for the annual solemnity of the election of their new *Alcalde*.

The Mayor of the Sea, chief of the brotherhood, is elected every year by a limited suffrage, and ever since the middle ages, this duty has been performed under the hot July sun, with an unaltered ceremonial.

They have marched down the "Calle Mayor" to music, and now have come up into the Town Hall where every one solemnly takes his place: the Alcalde of the town in the centre, under the daïs; on each side of him the two marine officers, the one French, the other Spanish, who are in command on the Bidassoa; then the two Alcaldes of the sea, the old and the new, and lastly the peasants and fishermen. The red banner, at least four hundred years old, has been raised; its archaic embroideries represent a scene of whale fishing and aureoled saints walking on troubled waters. They have attached it to the iron balcony, that it may float above the street during the ceremony.

The coffer brought by the beautiful dark girl is opened before the Alcaldes. It contains the treasure of the brotherhood which has to be verified: a large parchment covered with Gothic writing conferring special blessings from Pope Clement VIII; a silver crucifix, a silver reliquary, a silver chalice, a silver pit and rods for the masters in whalebone with silver knobs (for the brotherhood, who

only fish now for tunny and sardines, was founded long ago when whales were still taken in the Bay of Biscay).

These venerable objects that have been passed down from hand to hand for so many centuries, are still intact.

They read aloud the accounts of the community in that ancient tongue of unknown origin which strangers never succeed in wholly comprehending: So much for the general working, so much for relief, so much for the masses for the dead, and for safe voyages. Every fisherman round the room listens attentively: sailors descended from countless generations of sea adventurers who lived on the dangerous waters of the Bay of Biscay. Hardened faces, sunburnt and tanned—carefully shaved as monks. Rapacious in their way, given to poaching and defying the laws by throwing nets in French waters, even on our very shores, yet brave folk withal and bold seamen!

The verification over, there is evidently to be sport without. Already shouts arise from the crowded street: they are bringing the *bull!*

He arrives, a reluctant enough creature, fastened to a piece of wood that is drawn by a pair of oxen yoked together, the rope long enough to allow the unhappy animal to belabour the beasts before him with his horns. This unwieldly equipage is difficult to drive, and advances amidst many jerks and stops and kickings.

From under the porch of the Town Hall comes the sound of brass instruments, alternating with the Basque orchestra: little flutes and tambourines play the old airs in five time, an odd rhythm of unknown antiquity, so strange to our ears.

Meanwhile the bull, with its swathed horns, has been

detached from the team and tied to a stone pillar by a long cord that allows him to sweep the whole street. Maddened and stupified, it rushes headlong at the passers-by who call it, and dodge dexteriously aside. Then come mad stampedes, banging of doors, galloping on the slippery pavement, cries of fright, stumbles, dangerous escapes and shouts of laughter.

When the sport is over the fishermen form into procession again to return to their quarter by the sea, where a gala is prepared in the house of the new Mayor.

At the head, the band, tambourines and flute. Then the tall beautiful girl who carries the sacred coffer, and who falls at once into the rhythmic walk, swaying with the music. Next the great banner, the mayors, the officers and the priests. Lastly the fishermen and the crowd that accompany them in ever increasing numbers.

They file along the gloomy narrow street of high houses in joyous haste, descending, after the turning by the church, towards the sea—away suddenly from the stuffiness of Fontarabia, along the side of a fence that slopes precipitously down to the depths of the Bay of Biscay; the Pyrenees, the coast of France and the infinite blue ocean, lying in a glory of light at their feet.

Down there, on the shore, rests the modest little house of the new mayor of the sea, surrounded, in the Basque way, by plane trees pruned to form a roof. The doors are open. On the arrival of the little train the sacred banner is planted by the entrance, and the precious coffer put away in the recess of an alcove behind the bed.

A table, simply arranged for the feast, and decorated with large bouquets, stands in a small low room, the

rafters low and as oppressive as those on a ship. The whitewashed walls are hung with pictures of Christ, of the Virgin, and the saints who protect seamen.

They crowd in and sit down, mayors, officers, priests and the more notable fishermen, as many as it will hold. The place is hot as an oven, in spite of occasional wafts of sea-air. Fish and shell-fish, with every kind of sauce, are served by smiling girls and women. Between each course cigarettes are exchanged and lighted—and fishing matters and smuggling are talked over in Spanish, and more especially in Basque.

The room is on the ground floor, close to the people walking about outside. Through the open window, in the foreground, the red banner is visible, now waving high, now almost sweeping the sand. Then the beach where a fandango is being danced to music, and between the dancers, who turn and sway, their arms raised high, is a glimpse of the deep blue sea covered to-day with hundreds of black sleeping atoms—the boats of the fishermen keeping holiday. The people outside come in turn, and look and smile through the window. Even passing strangers from Biarritz and Saint Sebastian, cyclists in knickerbockers, and elegant women in large feathered hats. These latter examine the banner—the beautiful work, and the strange personages embroidered on it.

And as far from them as these embroideries they find so amusing—as far, thank Heaven, from their notions and their modern emptinesses, are the crude bronzed fishermen, who eat at this table between pictures of Christ, in the whole simpleness of bygone times, with the same hopes, the same dreams, the same joys.

The Grotto of Isturitz.

ALL grottoes are more or less alike, their galleries, their stalactites and their domes are of one architecture. The same mysterious Genii, who invent the forms of the slow crystalizations, who preside at the metamorphoses of inorganic matter, have superintended with an eternal patience the moulding of their white arabesques. However, this grotto at Isturitz deserves to be seen, though doubtless there are others in existence more wonderful.

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It is situated in the heart of the old Basque country, which we approach by shady roads through ravines and woods, half way up a wild mountain side.

At first we have to climb up tiny tracks, between rocks and streamlets, on a carpeted way of sweet-smelling mint and wild flowers. As we get higher and higher we see that the country all round us is of the same character:

pastural, shady and peaceful, with great woods, and here and there little churches nestling among the trees.

The entrance to the grotto is a hole closed by a wall of masonry and a door of some kind.

Our guide, an Isturitz peasant, thrusts in a large key and opens it up for us, and we enter at once into the darkness and damp and cold, into the silence so full of frightning echoes;—and the strange mystery of subterranean regions steals on us.

We go down into the depths by a steep slope. The roof rises higher and higher over our heads, till the flames of our candles are entirely lost, as in the deep shadows of a cathedral.

We come into the great nave. In the centre, in spite of the appalling darkness in which our lights flicker, something gigantic can be vaguely distinguished, rising up in an almost human attitude, white as milk, suggesting an alabaster colossus that would endeavour to touch the vaulted roof with its head.

Our guide throws down, at the feet of this creature, a handful of straw which he had brought with him to set ablaze for the final spectacle later on.

He wishes first to lead us into the several side galleries where all those things and beings that haunt bad dreams are petrified. Stalactites in infinite variety are grouped together in families, the forms in each more or less resembling one another, as if the Genii of the Grotto had taken to classifying them.

One gallery is consecrated more especially to light fringes, so delicate sometimes that a touch would break them; they hang down everywhere like frozen rain, fall-

ing from the roof in innumerable garlands: fringes of all widths, very long, or quite short, that separate or intermingle with a surprising variety of caprice.

Elsewhere they are like the long white fingers of a corpse, sometimes open, sometimes bent like a claw; they might be a collection of arms and hands, gigantic, some of them, that have been arranged, hung up, stuck in profusion on the cold partitions; but never a sharp point, never an angle anywhere; all of the same cream-like appearance that excludes any idea of hardness: one expects it to give to the slightest pressure, and is surprised, on touching it, to find it as rigid as marble.

Here and there a monster equally white, of alarming outline, rises or crouches unexpectedly in the middle of the path, or tapers in a shadowy corner. And when one realizes that the smallest of these motionless creatures has required at least two thousand years of work at the hands of the genii *décorateurs* we gain a conception of patience, of possible duration rather crushing to our human transitoriness.

Elsewhere is the region of great animal forms, soft and rounded, a confusion of elephants' trunks and ears, piles of larvae, of human embryos, with huge eyeless heads, all the waste of still-born creatures. And everywhere those isolated beings, separated from the confused mass of germs, seated about anywhere with swinging limbs, and hanging ears.

. . . . . .

When we come back to the first nave our guide lights his straw fire, and the oppressive darkness vanishes, recedes

with the aisles into the long corridors which we have just left. In the glow of this red flame, the high vault of the cathedral is revealed, exquisitely festooned and fringed; pillars stand out curiously worked from top to bottom.

The colossal white spectre, dimly seen on our arrival, looks exactly like a woman draped in veils. The shadow of it rises and falls and dances on the partitions of this weird place.

One stands confounded before the meaning of these things, before the enigma of these forms, before the reason of such strange magnificence built up in the silence and darkness, without object, by chance, in the course of hundreds and thousands of years through the imperceptible dripping of the stones.

On coming out of the grotto, one experiences a sense of delight at being once again in the pure warm air, amongst the verdure of the oaks, with the wide wooded horizon, in the light and the open; instead of the sepulchral atmosphere of the underground, the sweet healthy scent of the mint and wild carnations; instead of the continuous dripping of dead waters in the silence below, the gay sound of the torrents—living waters, and in the distance, the tinkling bells of cattle returning to the fields.

For a moment, even to breathe in the fresh air is intoxicating, and the spreading country on all sides, so quiet and green, seems an Eden.

Midnight Mass.

IT is Christmas night, but the air at this extreme point of Southern France is as soft as it might be in April. A crescent moon, that must soon sink behind the dark mass of mountains in the west, is still in the sky among tiny clouds that resemble flakes of white eiderdown.

From the French shore, where I live, I have just heard 11 o'clock struck by the old bell of Fontarabia on the Spanish shore. And here comes the boat I ordered to take me at this nocturnal hour to the other side of the Bidassoa, the divisional line of the frontier; it glides along by the light of a lantern to the foot of my garden that is laid out in terraces above the dark water.

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Therefore let us away to Spain. The wide sluggish river is luminous in the moonlight;—this Christmas evening, as mild as a night in April.

For several years past, I have crossed these waters on the same night and at the same hour; sometimes in the mild weather, sometimes in frosty weather, or in storms; sometimes alone, sometimes with friends of whom I have since lost sight, or who are dead. And it was always to go to the same midnight mass, in the same convent of the Capuchin monks, which is situated in a rather lonely spot by the banks of the Bidassoa, on the road that leads from Fontarabia to Irun. There is a certain melancholy in revisiting every year the same things, in the same places, on the same dates and at the same hour.

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After a short crossing, of perhaps a quarter of an hour, smooth as the gliding of shadows, we land on the Spanish shore, and being recognised by the carabineers on guard, I can walk freely towards the monks' chapel by a road that follows the bank of the river at the foot of the mountains.

The bright crescent moon is actually deserting me, leaving me to the care of the stars in a more shadowy world. All along the road there are high Basque houses, old and dilapidated, their white-washed walls perceptibly white even in the dark; and here and there phantom trees with great leafless branches. Parts of the road more closed in than the rest, are overshadowed by rocks, and enveloped in deeper gloom. Everything slumbers in peace and silence.

Twenty minutes' walk, or half-an-hour perhaps, going leisurely along in the quiet night that surely borrows a soothing atmosphere from the sweet mystery of Christ-

mastide. Two or three bands of singers pass me, whose approach can be heard from some distance in the midst of such silence; boys from Fontarabia, who walk about with lanterns, singing ancient songs in which the Magi of Bethlehem figure; some accompanying themselves on a guitar, others on a tambourine, all a little tipsy. They say a cheerful good-night to me as they pass, and the sound of their voices, and of the jerky ancient music is lost in the distance.

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Here at last are the great walls of the convent, pale grey and unreal in appearance under the midnight stars; I go up a high flight of steps, and already there filters to me, from within, the odour of incense, out into the pure air.

The door of the chapel is open, throwing a ray of yellow light into the blue of the night. It seems that this evening anyone may enter without interference. And yet formerly, on Christmas Days, this door was barred; it was necessary to pass through the sacristy after having shown a *patte blanche* to a suspicious monk, and only little groups of the brazen-faced, or of the elect, succeeded in gaining admittance. But in our time everything is simplified, everything is made commonplace; sanctuaries have no more barriers, and are open to all comers.

The chapel is full already, and on entering, dense clouds of incense make it almost impossible to see, an unexpected darkness, different enough to that outside. The Capucins, motionless before the altar, and the women uniformly veiled in black, motionless in the nave, are vaguely dis-

cernible. Through the murmurings of the litanies chanted in low voices from the choir, a strange impression arrests one at the sight of this mass of women, whose heads, draped in black, are bent towards the ground. They have all put on the mantilla of mourning generally worn in the Basque country during religious services in sign of human frailty. Everything here is meant to remind one of death. It seems to hover gloomily over these several hundred bowed heads. Each pavement stone in the church is a funeral slab, and one is conscious that the ground one walks on is full of bones. A cadaverous odour, that the incense cannot dissimilate, rises from this crowd of peasants and poor folk, among whom the old are in the majority, and here and there a hollow cough resounds loudly under the vaulted roof. As a fact it is only the terrifying thought of death that has brought all these beings here to-night to pray in common; against death that all these bells are ringing, the noise of them breaking suddenly on the silence. And against death too, that this great white Virgin has been erected, it alone lit up by the flickering tapers in the sombre chapel—Oh! so smiling and white this great Virgin wreathed in pale roses: surely a deceiving vision of infinite sweetness, radiant among the clouds of incense.

The incense grows thicker and thicker in the nave, and the statues of the saints become confused with the motionless monks, whose beards and locks are as archaic as those of the images of wood and of stone.

However, the muttered litanies are only a sort of preliminary incantation; a preparation for something else that is to happen, and for which the crowd is waiting.

Above the faithful, who are kneeling or sitting, a vast mysterious gallery barred like a harem, projects from the front wall over a third of the church; one feels that it is full of invisible assistants. At times the sound of a drum escapes, or the clashing noise of brass, as if they were preparing for some wonderful music.

The moment has come, Mass is about to begin. Many more tapers are lighted. A dozen monks, whose gowns and cowls are of white silk, enter the cloudy choir in ritualistic order, preceded by deacons who carry lanterns on long shafts, ancient and half barbaric.

And then suddenly from the secret gallery high up, there bursts forth a strange, strident music, that almost makes one shudder after the soothing monotony of the litanies: Christ is born, the supposed conqueror of death, has appeared on earth, and his advent is hailed with a sudden and mad joy! Two or three *hautboys*, which have the biting tones of Bedouin bagpipes, lead a choir of recklessly joyous men's voices, accompanied by thirty Basque drums, and by a legion of castenets. The whole thing, though discordant and unexpected in a church, succeeded nevertheless in producing by its very strangeness a sort of religious fervour. They are old Christmas hymns belonging to Guipuzcoa, as quick and lively as *habaneras*, or as *séguidilles*. And the monks in the gallery, who are making all this noise of savage revelry, accompany their music with a sort of ritual step. One hears the movements of beating time, and sees their dancing shadows on the walls.

The long and complicated Mass continues with a bewildering noise of *hautboys*, and of human notes in a nasal falsetto. Above the black veiled heads, above the poor

and aged, into the smoke of the incense that grows still thicker, the old world hymns succeed one another in a growing exaltation, accompanied all the while by the little thunder of the rattling tambourines, and by the dry light noise of the castenets sounding between deft fingers. Then, when all is over, there is a hurried movement among the peasants and the poor towards the choir, where a doll has just arrived in the arms of a monk, who offers it to the faithful to kiss, a poor lifeless doll that has been carefully wrapped in a child's swaddling clothes, and that represents the new-born Saviour.

And now they all disperse into the night that has grown colder and of a deeper blue.

I return alone to the boat that is to take me to the French shore, as one just awakend from a dream of the olden times. I come away rather saddened: another Christmas has passed over my head, another year has stretched into the abyss without having brought me the solution of anything, nor the hope of anything.

And, as I go back alone, I feel that I am a thousand times more disinherited than the least of those humble people, those old men or those poor folk, who, praying as their ancestors prayed, have just kissed the simple, ridiculous, and adorably ineffable doll in its linen.

The Passing of the Procession.

EVERY year, for centuries past, on the Wednesday morning preceding Pentecost, some twenty or thirty Basque villages on the Spanish slope of the Pyrenees have been emptied of their parishoners. The good folk, laden with crosses like that borne by Christ, make a pilgrimage up to the Convent of Roncevalles; and, in order to see the procession, it is necessary to sleep the night before at Burguette, the last village it passes through before arriving at the venerable monastry.

Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, a peaceful and charming town that the railway, alas! will soon spoil, is the place I start from on this Tuesday, the 1st of June, under a very cloudy sky, to drive to Burguette by shady roads through an immense forest of beeches.

About an hour after leaving Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port we get into Spain, and stop at Val-Carlos, the village where we have to alight for the frontier formalities.

And then, as Burguette is on the other side of the Pyrenees (not far from the top, and at a very high altitude) we ascend again for another four hours, penetrating into the heart of the forest which grows more and more wild and green. A coming storm growls ominously around us among the clouds, and the bell of Val-Carlos begins to ring out in a cracked, mournful tone. Its vibrations follow us for a long time, and then are lost below in the infinite silence of the trees.

On the banks of the road-side there is a monotonous wealth of pink flowers: pink silenes, pink amourettes, pink foxgloves; besides columbines, great campanulas and wonderful saxifrages. And everywhere falling waters, in tiny streams, or noisy cascades, among the ferns.

The hail-storm bursts suddenly upon us, sharp and cuting like the lash of a whip. We stop by an almost vertical side of the mountain carpeted with these same flowers in magnificent profusion. The hail pelts us with myriads of glass pearls. The long stalks of the foxgloves, cut and broken, scatter their flowers on the moss, so many of them, fluttering like pink ribands amongst the green leaves and grass.

It is over quickly enough—the shower passes, and the horses move on again, dragging us up the never-ending zig-zags in the forest of beeches. And all the trees of this forest are alike, apparently of the same shape and age, having reached complete development without hindrance, as a primæval forest grows.

The storm continues to grumble in the distance, and above our heads stretches a dark and unbroken cloud which we gradually approach. The forest rises on all

sides to vanish in this cloud; high up, the trees and the rocks that touch this filmy veil seem confused in a motionless smoke, their heads entirely drowned in the grey mass. We seem to be climbing the sides of a great closed gulf; heavy rocks overhang us on all sides; it is so dark that it might be a premature twilight, and would be gloomy indeed were it not for the glory of the verdure and the wondrous pink flowers.

Soon we get quite close to the misty roof which looks as if it could actually be touched. At a turning of the deserted road we meet a procession, a humble village procession wet through by the shower of hail—a hundred mountaineers following a silver cross and three priests in muslin surplices. They are returning towards Val-Carlos, singing litanies, infinitely melancholy heard here amidst the impassive sovereignity of the trees and dark sky.

Then again no one, nothing but the great stillness, and the silence of those gigantic walls of verdure, the mystery of the forest that stretches up to join the nebulous vault that ever nears our heads like a sort of Dantesque roof. We are passing through a gloomy obscurity all green and grey.

And, after about four hours of this monotonous climbing, we get at last into the cloud which proves a freezing mist; we can distinguish nothing but the nearest branches —the great, white branches of the beech trees. The evening is approaching, and everything around us grows more shadowy.

When we are at the highest point of this zig-zag road, which now begins to descend before us, the rain comes down in torrents, whilst daylight fades; still, through the

downfall, we can see the high convent walls of Roncevalles where we shall return to-morrow morning with the procession. Half a mile further on, as the twilight deepens, we reach Burguette. In the pelting rain and the splashing mud I alight at the only inn in the village, which appears to be two or three centuries old.

There I expected to spend a solitary and quiet night. But no, on the eve of the pilgrimage it is the custom apparently to make merry. After supper a guitar appears, the handle decorated with tufts of wool, like the head of a mule, then a second, then a third, a whole orchestra in fact, including a tambourine spangled over with brass.

And the warm Spanish music begins, first lightly and hesitatingly, as the cider and wine goes the round to raise the good folks' spirits. Gradually *fandangoes*, *jòtas*, *habaneras* are re-enforced and accelerated, always with more noise and at a greater pace. Carabineers arrive, smugglers and shepherds. There are no women, excepting the two servants of the house, who hardly know which way to turn. But the men dance among themselves with shouts of childish delight.

Now the guitarists sing, as their hands move wildly over the strings; with head thrown back, eyes closed as if with intoxication, and mouth wide open displaying wolf-like teeth, they repeat the airs indefinitely, with a kind of fury, on notes almost too high. From midnight until two o'clock, whilst the storm is raging outside, everybody dances, even the innkeeper, even his wife, and the old men and women whom the noise has awakened in the corners. The ancient inn vibrates from top to bottom: one feels the old wood-work and the blackened ceiling shake,

whilst the walls seem to be animated, impregnated with the dancing vibrations of the guitars.

Wednesday, June 2nd.

Far and near, the clattering of footsteps and the tinkling of numberless little bells that hang on the necks of the sheep and goats, is the music that breaks on the morning in this out of the way village, as day dawns among the cloudy peaks.

The old inn awakes, silent now, after having vibrated all night to the exaltation of song and the frenzy of guitars.

It is seven o'clock when I come down from my room and stand on the threshold of the door to wait for the procession to pass. It is no longer raining. A little sun pierces the wandering clouds in which the village has been wrapt. The street through which the procession of crosses will defile, is fairly regular and long, and runs between small old houses that are all alike, with high dark roofs made of planks of beech, the wood of the neighbouring forests. The mud in the road is indented with endless little marks made by the cloven feet of flocks which have been driven out on to the high pasture lands, or into the fields. From time to time peasants and peasant women pass by, on mules also with bells, their harness gleaming with brass, and saddles finished with red pendants. All are going in the direction of Roncevalles for the pilgrimage of the day.

The open space near the Church would be an excellent place to see the procession come up from the village below, to see it appearing from out of that white mist resting like a cloud in the hollow of the Pyrenees.

The Church is heavy and defaced; centuries of storms have beaten upon its rustic granite front, and the open space before it is riddled like that of the streets by the footprints of sheep and goats.

Suddenly, high up in the belfry windows where two bells of equal size are visible, some men appear, who set to ringing hastily, using the tongues of the bells as mallets. Ding, ding, ding, they strike the bronze with frantic rapidity, just as they played the guitar last night. The air is filled at once with a wild crashing noise, the signal for the procession they have already perceived and that will soon be visible to us.

Then it comes, emerging from the mist. At first it looks like a procession of wooden beams painfully carried by men in mourning. Then, as it draws nearer and the great blocks of wood become more distinctly outlined, they are seen to have the shape of instruments of torture: crosses, like that of Calvary, which penitents are bearing on their backs, supporting the cross bars with outstretched arms as though they were suffering crucifixion. One begins to hear an intermittent moaning that rises in rhythmic lamentation from this moving mass of men. There are five hundred perhaps, all in black, with black cowls drawn over the face, and walking bare-footed in the mud, two abreast, with hurried steps, unlike the slow pace usually adopted in processions. *Ora pro nobis! Ora pro nobis!* they cry in a lugubrious tone, as they pass with strange haste, their head bowed under the cross. At certain intervals are the mayors of the villages, hat in hand and draped in ceremonial capes. Next comes a group of deacons in muslin surplices, carrying on long poles the gilt

crosses belonging to the twenty or thirty neighbouring parishes, mostly of ancient workmanship, some almost barbarous. Then, bringing up the rear, troops of women in black mantillas advance, singing litanies to the Virgin in mournful voices. They have no cowls on their faces; their mantillas veil but withered ugliness, looks of sordid suffering: a population sapped of youth by the bleak climate of such regions—pale girls of the heights where the conditions of life become overwhelming. On the Church square, and scattered about the street of Burguette, are the inevitable tourists, attracted as though by some frontier feast, to this remote village, alas! no longer sufficiently protected by the mountains, no longer far enough away from Biarritz or from Bayonne. It is needless to say that these intruders are armed with opera-glasses, various appurtenances, kodacs, bicycles, even flutes. And in front of all these humble inhabitants of the mountains, passing on their way in childlike faith to kneel before Our Lady of Roncevalles, in gruesome rags pitiful to see—in front of them, these people find matter for laughter, for remarks that are the quintessence of inanity.

Still, on towards Roncevalles the procession continues to ascend, uttering their lugubrious groans; and in its wake I find myself once again in the country.

The country here is extraordinarily green, being constantly in a state of moisture from its proximity to or contact with the clouds; rather melancholy, at the same time suggesting a little paradise that the hand of man has scarcely touched; and something indescribable in the air makes one conscious of the height one has attained.

The road passes through clumps of great beeches, their

branches covered with white lichen, through fields of daisies where white goats feed in flocks. But further on all around is the forest of endless beeches, peaceful and monotonous, silent, fresh and green. The peaks in the neighbourhood of this plateau of Burguette, that appeared to tower so high when seen from the plains below, look like little hills quite close at hand, wooded always by the same strong species. And the clouds that are at home here, wander round us like smoke, like fleecy eiderdown, floating or resting over the green splendour of the trees.

The procession which I continue to follow, moves on still at the same quick pace, noiselessly because the feet of these mountaineers are bare or else shod in *espadrilles*. Nothing is heard but lamentations persistently repeated in a measured rhythm. Before me is the black mass of women; then the group with the silver crosses on which a ray of sunlight falls at this moment, lighting up the the nebulous green of the background; lastly in the vanguard beyond, the crowd of crucified penitents with outstretched arms, who will be hidden soon in the thick grey mist before them with its mother-of-pearl reflections. The ancient Roncevalles, towards which they are all wending, is invisible in the clouds, a great pale mist that was passing had stopped to envelope it.

We are in truth quite close to this Roncevalles we cannot see, for there is a sudden clash of bells which signal our approach in rapid strokes, as the bells of Burguette did this morning. The Convent looms out in a moment, magnified by the indistinctness of its outlines blurred by the enshrouding clouds. It appears colossal and fierce with its fortress dungeon and its confusion of heavy walls.

The procession plunges into the shade of an old granite porch to cross a deserted cloister with ruined arches, whose crevices are filled with ferns and moss. The mist still envelopes the human silhouettes, and produces a chill sepulchral dampness, giving everything a look of unreality, that takes the imagination back into the twilight of the past.

At last we penetrate, like a flood, into the obscurity of the Church clouded in incense. At the further end, tapers burn before the old tabernacles of burnished gold. The wan lights make the gilded columns, the gilded altar piece —the remains of ancient splendour—gleam in the midst of the dilapidation and gloom. But in the nave there is not light enough to see one's way, and at first there is some confusion as the procession crowds in: sweating bodies push and elbow one another; the crosses come into collision, one hears the clashing of wood and the heavy bangs on the flag-stones.

By degrees, however, the crowd gropes its way, and one's eyes get accustomed to the darkness. The whole of the centre aisle is occupied by a dense mass of women veiled in black, and on either side, symmetrically arranged, are the five hundred crucified, with arms extended, tired and out of breath. This is the end of their painful march under the weight of their heavy burdens. Now the monks are going to say mass for them.

Mon Dieu! without those drifting clouds it might all have seemed vulgar and trivial.

The Sword Dance.

UNDER the glare of a midday sun the tennis was drawing to an end. The six champions were sweating from the heat in the centre of a huge grey court, cemented and levelled so that the balls should bound true; in the restrained movement of their arms, in the still vigorous play of their muscles, and in their agile leaps one devined a fatigue, and some haste to get the game over.

Moreover, I had lost all interest in the match, the sides were quite unequal, and there could be no doubt as to the ultimate result. I ceased to watch the players, and my eyes fell on an inscription in white chalk, written on the dazzling wall that was rounded at its base where the balls struck with a hard sound. I read it mechanically, *Viva Euskual Herria* said the inscription in large awkwardly traced letters (Long live the Basque country!) Doubtless the work of some passing enthusiast, or of a child. It took hold of me, assuming a sudden importance in my mind:

these unfamiliar words so strangely sonorous, this cry of revolt against the general process of levelling summed up for me all that yet remained of what was Basque in this Saint-Jean-de-Luz, which day by day was fading from her.

When one has lived some time in this dying Euskual-Herria one sees so many games of tennis, and plays so many oneself, that they lose their power of producing an impression of local colour on the imagination. Moreover to-day—a great gala day, in a town that is fast becoming a kind of watering place—the tiers that surround the court were filled by a cosmopolitan crowd of most distressingly commonplace appearance.

Then there arrived a troup of odd-looking peasants, all dressed alike. The Basques who were present received them with murmurs of welcome: "You! you! you!" The visitors smiled and answered according to the custom: "You! you! you!" in high bird-like voices, such as certain tribes of Red Indians assume when they dance.

They wore black trousers, black caps, black blouses kilted in a thousand pleats and worn short, ending indeed above the loins; their faces were clean shaven, and had that simple expression peculiar to old world people. They were "Souletins," delegated dancers, who had come to take part in the festivities from the ancient district of Soule, whose traditions are still immutable. Their music accompanied them: a tambourine, and a kind of great flute shaped like a quiver, a veritable pipe of Pan.

In their presence the game was finished. And as soon as the drawling voice of the crier had proclaimed the last point in Basque, before the crowd had time to rise, the organisers of the festivities invited the Souletins to dance.

Then the old man, who had been playing the pastoral flute, advanced into the middle of the court, whilst the dancers, who numbered about thirty, formed a large circle around him holding hands. At the sound of a tiny trill, strangely mysterious, and as if coming from far off, that proceeded from the huge archaic flute, the men began to move slowly in measured time. Here and there stupid laughter was heard to escape from under elegant hats; but the greater number of the people, even of the more common tourists were impressed and interested. A hush fell upon the crowd present at this almost silent dance, in which the light slippers of the Souletins glided noiselessly over the surface of the court.

The spirit of past ages had surely come to life once again at the sound of the flute, communicating to the sensitive, unexpected thrills, and to coarser natures a feeling of respect in spite of themselves.

With the regularity of automatons, the Souletins executed to a mournful measure the quickest and most complicated steps. Occasionally a nervous leap would raise them from the ground altogether, their pleated blouses, so quaintly short, spreading wide under their arms like the skirts of a ballet girl—so light were they, one could not hear them fall to the ground again, and notwithstanding the great speed with which their feet moved, their faces remained impassive and solemn. Still the old flutist stood in the centre of the circle, playing his shrill music as though he led them by some sorcery. The midday sun stunted the shadows of these dancers in black garments, almost to nothing, as they whirled in a circle on the grey asphalt.

The Angelus began to ring—for thank God the Angelus still rings out from the venerable belfries in this country—as the crowd dispersed after the performance, pouring into the streets of Saint-Jean-de-Luz.

A dance was announced to take place at four o'clock (the ancient sword dance to be performed by young mountaineers of Guipuzcoa); meanwhile the time had to be passed by lunching at some hotel, among tourists of all classes, and then by wandering about the gay streets of the town, where here and there the Basque music of tambourines and fifes could be heard.

In Saint-Jean-de-Luz there are still some delightful corners, some quite secluded streets where the original character of the place is yet preserved: jutting out roofs; whitewashed façades intersected by green or red beams; great trees overhanging garden walls; glimpses of the blue sea, or of the purple Pyrenees; peace and silence between white walls on a pavement of pebbles gathered from the sea shore. Nevertheless, dreadful modern buildings are rising up daily—not a corner of the shore, not a lovely hill-side that is not dishonoured now by some great costly erection conceived by bloated barbarians, by snobs gone mad. It would be so simple not to disfigure the country, to build Basque houses, as a few artists have had the good taste to do! Alas, alas, who will save us from this modern trumpery, from over luxury, from uniformity—and idiots!

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I sat down to wait under some trees of a square in front of a *café* that had been established in a house of the seventeenth century, the ex-abode of royalty, and watched

bicyclist after bicyclist pass by; women with befeathered hats, women of all nationalities, of all ranks, but who copied one another in their dress, devoid of style or meaning, with a complete disdain of any difference of type. It is one of the achievements of this century that, at any watering place, it is quite impossible to tell at first sight whether you are at Ostend, at Trouville, or at Saint Sebastian.

I entirely lost that note of strangeness the dancers had given me in the morning. An effort was even necessary to remind myself that, in those distant mountains, there still exists the remnants of a people who guards, with the secret of its origin, the faith and traditions and language of its ancestors. However, two guitarists approached me, a blind old man and a young girl, who had come from Spain to beg for pence during the festivities. And the moment I heard their music, a soft music almost drowned by the noise of the wind from the sea, and the confused murmur from the town, a veil began to fall—to fall on all the modern trivialities. They struck up an old "Malguénia." One of the guitars played the air; it was like a song of Arabia, a moan spreading over desert plains. The other accompanied in little short and trembling notes that imitated the croaking of grasshoppers in deserts of scorching sand. It seemed to speak of sorrows born by souls in other ages, in Andalusia, at the heavy hour of noon, when the Moors were in possession. . . In the indefinable nature of this music, in the mystery of its rhythm, the peculiar genius of the race will be preserved for centuries still to come, in spite of the universal fusion of men and things.

At last, on the stroke of four, the young mountaineers of Guipuzcoa, who had come to dance, appeared in the court of the convent where the crowd had been assembled for some time on several hundred chairs.

One held an immense silk standard, the others naked swords. Unconcerned, and solemn in appearance as their brothers of Soule this morning, they mounted the platform that had been prepared for them.

They wore red caps, were all in their shirt sleeves, and tieless, in the Basque fashion; their trousers were white under an open waistcoat, with the traditional leather ornaments on their calves: straps of leather studded with small bells that would jingle in a moment with a barbaric sound as they danced.

The decorated platform certainly looked rather like a theatre at a fair, in spite of a simplicity almost naif in its directness. To appreciate them fully it was necessary to put aside any such comparison, and to forget equally the modern crowd and a thousand ridiculous little details—in fact the general surroundings.

Moreover, they themselves appeared quite unconscious of their audience. It seems that on the previous day they had replied to the director of a neighbouring Casino, who wished to engage them for the evening, "No, we are Basques who dance in the open air before Basques, the dances of our country, that the traditions of them may be prolonged. We are not folk who take money to show ourselves off."

They were tall, supple, strong men, quite as much at their ease before this crowd of bathers as in their own village, when it is a question of dancing among themselves,

on Sundays, in the open places before the churches. At first they knelt down together with heads bent low towards the earth in a magnificent salute to their standard; the bearer himself, kneeling in the centre of the motionless group, began slowly to brandish the pole, with supple movements in such a way as to cause the folds of silk to fly like great agitated wings above their heads. Then they all rose, grandly tall, and the dance commenced to the sound of a warlike march played on fife and tambourine. The step was singularly complicated, varied from time to time by tremendous bounds that shook the little bells about them, and rattled the leather straps against their calves. There was a brandishing of rapiers in time to music, quick thrusts and parrying—a simultaneous meeting of all the swords with the clash of steel. It recalled some scene in antiquity—one of those warlike dances in which the young men of Greece delighted.

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Many other dances followed on this same platform, all very ancient, some dating back incalculable ages, so remote is the origin of these people. They performed the ancient pastoral of Abraham, played by "young boys from the community of Barcus—in which angels and demons figure by the side of the patriarch, nay even Chodorlahomor, King of Sodom."

Later, when it had grown dark, they began again in the public Square, this time without a platform, in the very midst of the crowd. The sword dance appeared peculiarly noble and barbaric in the glimmer of lanterns under a moonlit sky. And then at the end a general fan-

dango took place—everyone, girls and boys in a mad whirl of intoxicating pleasure.

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For a whole week the traditional Basque festivities succeeded one another at Saint-Jean-de-Luz, all the old dances, the diverse games of tennis; improvisations by inspired shepherds, competitions in those strange cries of hilarity called *Irrintzina* which make one shudder; songs and sacred hymns in churches. And the performers of these bear names whose consonants echo down to us from primitive times, names such as Agestaran, Lizarraga, Imbil, Olaïz, and Héguiaphal. . .

It all takes place amidst surroundings that become more and more incongruous, before assemblies in which Beotiens predominate, and is so out of vogue, so little characteristic of the country now, alas! that at moments it seems almost lamentable in the midst of the foolishly smiling crowd.

Yet how touching, how worthy of sympathy and respect are these efforts at preservation, these religious revivals of past customs which those festivities represent!

Cathedral Impressions.

PURGOS, when the light wanes, at the close of an April Sunday, in the splendour of Southern Spring, and in all the golden red of the sunset.

The air is still and very soft, and as the daylight fades, a joyless evening spreads gradually over the old world city, isolated here in the country, decrepid and dying on the banks of a meagre river that has no communication with the life-bringing sea. In the waning light it seems as if the oppression of this superb name Burgos, evoking splendours of greater days, weighs upon her Sunday streets, where the Spain of to-day, so insignificant beside the Spain of former times, perambulates in its fine modern clothes.

The Cathedral, the very celebrated cathedral, at once comes into sight: above the houses appear points that rise high into the golden air, points and arrows miraculously carved, so frail in their exquisite tracery, like paper lace-work, almost, that the wind must blow away—and for

centuries they have been there, immovable. At this hour they flame red, caught by the sinking sun that in a moment will colour them alone, leaving the little street in darkness, whence gradually the Sunday crowd will disappear into the obscure dwellings.

The very heart of the town is the cathedral's throne. I am conducted there through a labyrinth of old houses as quickly as possible, as I am leaving at nightfall. Here it is. Great walls pierced by Gothic ogives, flights of steps, sumptuous porticoes where a world of statues, sculptured in red stone, are ranged in rows, placed one above the other. Then, majestic gates—and suddenly a twilight, a sepulchral chill on one's shoulders, a sweet smell of incense in a subteranean darkness: I have gained the inside, penetrating a world of incredible magnificence, of solitude gloomily enchanted. In front of me are dark receding distances, traversed here and there by rainbow beams that fall from some great window, whilst flagstones resound under my feet in the silence, echoing as in a cave.

It is the cathedral, the legendary cathedral, the marvel of olden times; more surprising than Milan, Strasburg or Toledo. In its Sunday evening abandonment, the great organs silent and the censers extinguished, it inspires something of dread.

At first, the impression one gets, is that of entering a petrified forest, of walking under huge trees. The columns, the enormous trunks rise up entwined by what might be ivy or moss, in fact, fine and wonderful sculpture. Above, wherever these pillars spread out their branch-like arches, masses of foliage cluster, a veritable leafage of stone, close and thick, like a roof of high forest trees overhead, testi-

fying to the patient work of a whole generation of men. All carved in living stone, all infinitely durable in spite of such rare delicacy, and already transmitted to us from afar through the past centuries. Between enormous pillars, in all directions, are giant gates in bronze and iron, thirty feet high, prodigiously wrought, separating the great nave from a multitude of secondary chapels still more inconceivably magnificent, where the delicate leaves, the fairy-like bowers, which there too rise to the vaulted roof, are no longer of stone but of glittering gold.

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A man, who is the guardian of all this wealth, opens these heavy barriers of bronze or of iron, one after another, with wrought keys that are as long as daggers; the banging of the gates, as they close behind us, resound lingeringly under the vaulted roof.

It is too late, he says, to see everything; night is coming on. He hastens me forward.

At first we were alone in this vast place, then four or five mountain peasants arrive in old clothes, with a shrinking look, uncouth and miserable, who ask permission to follow, and join themselves to us in a group. They peer quite closely at the sumptuous things in the growing dusk, touching the gold with their fingers, and moistening the marbles with their breath.

We go into the choir which is full of inestimable treasures. It is shut off in a kind of great bronze cage, concealed by long draperies of brocade falling the whole height of the nave; candlesticks of embossed silver, that measure five or six feet, are arranged before the high altar

glistening with gold. Afterwards, into all the secondary chapels, whose gates in opening, awake louder and more lingering echoes in the growing darkness, their golden traceries, imitating acanthus leaves and dainty chicory plants, seen close at hand, are peopled by hundreds of figures and animals. Then, hurrying on again, we are shown the tombs of the saintly founders; the man, who conducts us, briskly raises the cloth of red and gold velvet that covers their images of alabaster or of marble, their white reclining statues. We pass through a labyrinth of cloisters full of souvenirs and relics; the doors are fastened by strange locks representing human faces, the key fitting into mouths that grin. And at last back to the immense nave again, nearly dark now, re-entering unexpectedly by a small door.

There is no sense of religious peace in the place; on the contrary, only a feeling of magnificence that is implacable and overpowering; no, not even calm, in spite of the dusk and the silence; not even the restful unity to be found in certain Japanese sanctuaries of the Holy Mountain, which, together with this one, are the most splendid temples to the Gods still unmolested by time. In this extravagant excess of wealth one is conscious of something wrong, of something intensely human and almost sensual. A prodigious past is evoked: the Spain of the great period, abounding in power and in gold; but the peace, the sweet peace of so many other Christian Churches is wholly absent here.

I have experienced, before now, that to see things for the first time by stealth, in the evening, in the fever of a hurried visit, is the way to receive a complete, definite

and just impression of them. It happened once, sometime ago now, that having paid my first visit to the Acropolis at Athens in the middle of the night, in the course of a few minutes, at the price of many difficulties, and at the risk of missing my ship, I remember that I caught a vivid glimpse of its ancient splendour, in a way that I have never since experienced. Thus with Burgos, I feel I would rather not come again to weaken and dwarf my impressions of the whole, merely for the sake of seeing some incomparable details I might undoubtedly discover.

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We are going out.

Two small lights burn like Tom Thumb tapers in the far distance of the nave, and near them a dark kneeling form becomes visible. Let us see what it is; let us approach very quietly over the resounding flagstones, in order not to disturb this praying phantom. Two wax tapers, such modest tapers, are burning before a picture of the Virgin, which hangs in a neglected corner, in an unimportant niche behind one of the great pillars, yet is sumptuous enough in its frame of old gold.

A woman dressed in black, with a mantilla of mourning on her head, is prostrate before it. She holds a miserable baby at her breast, a child but a few months old, in whose shrivelled little face there is already the stamp of death. She prays ardently for him as the wax of the tapers gradually diminishes, the penny tapers she has placed before the humblest picture she could find, this sorrowing creature. The contrast between the prodigious wealth all round and the rags of the supplicant is overwhelming and cruel: be-

tween the persistent durability of those many thousand saints draped in gold and the frailty of this little being with no to-morrow, brought to them all wrapt up in rags, and timidly presented before them that they may take pity on him, destined surely to return soon to mother earth.

She is already decrepid, this woman whose attitude suggests such boundless distress, a grandmother perhaps, disputing with death for the child of a dead daughter, or perhaps a mother, who, at an advanced age, has conceived a child that is not likely to live.

With infinite tenderness she holds and covers up the poor little human thing that owes its failure, its miserable state to some unknown chance; she draws a black handkerchief over the piteous face that seems to express already some future suffering, and wraps a shawl about the thin body no bigger than a doll's, to protect it from the sepulchral damp that is falling on it from the vaulted roof. Still she kneels, and her lips move in obstinate and vain repetitions. Now she looks at me with eyes full of desolation, divining a pity no doubt in mine, seeming to ask doesn't he look ill, my poor little one.

I turn away to elude her dumb question that tears at my heart, and pretend to be interested in other things. But the next moment, seeing that I remain there, she raises her head towards me again, after a quick glance at the splendour around. Evidently she is not quite convinced, and her eyes ask still more anxiously this time: Do you really think that they will listen to me, these magnificent divinities?

God! I do not know if they will listen. In her place I would rather carry my child to one of those country

chapels where the Virgin of simple folk reigns. The Madonnas and Saints who inhabit this place are, more than anything else, I think, creatures of ceremony, hardened by secular pomp. No, I cannot imagine that they would occupy themselves with a poor old woman in tears, and with her little deformed child who is dying.

The Passing of the Sultan.

THE window through which I am looking is in one of the Kiosks of the Yeldiz Palace, the habitual residence of His Majesty the Sultan.

And the window forms the frame to a great scene that is very peculiar, very unique, and that furnishes at the very first glimpse a precise indication of the time and place.

First, there is a Mosque, miraculously white in the dust and blazing June sun at mid-day, under a sky pale with heat, quite a new and elegant Mosque, though built in the pure old style, a Mosque suggesting the refinements of a modern Islam, in this, not unlike our new Gothic churches in which archaic researches are allied to perfected methods; almost too pretty with its high portico crowned by Arabian trefoils, the fine carving of its windosw, the grace of its minarets covered with ornaments like reversed stalactites, and surmounted by a glittering crescent of gold.

In the immediate neighbourhood all is equally new, the

ground sanded and naked, the trees young, the grass mown, and baskets of flowers arranged with all the care usual in princely residences.

Behind the white Mosque all in lace-work, that occupies the centre of the picture, and is the principal subject, appear indistinctly the great marvels of former times. In the distance—which, as the perspective indicates, we are looking down upon from a height—stretches the Bosphorus, the silhouette of Asiatic Scutari; then, that incomparable thing, the point of the old Seraglio jutting out into the water of Marmora, with minarets, cupolas and the cypresses of Stamboul: all lightly sketched in grey blues, devoured by the sunshine and the glare of the scintilating sea just visible under a veil of luminous dust, and occupying little space in the background, behind the lovely Mosque, like the diminutive houses and palaces that nestle near the arms and against the shoulders of the central figure in certain pictures by old masters. It is so wonderful this point of Stamboul with Saint Sophia and the old Seraglio, that the very indication of its presence evokes in this modern scene, recollections of the glorious past.

The interlacing roads, and alleys, and avenues that surround the Imperial Mosque, are full of soldiers on the march, approaching one another to the sound of military music, and gradually concentrating round the white perforated walls of the sanctuary, where evidently some solemnity is to take place. On all sides they are seen crossing one another, and zigzagging as in some endless fairy defile on the stage. Cavalry flags, black banners embroidered in silver, the red ensigns of the lancers, pass and repass before one another in a cloud of rising dust; the brass instruments

of the bands sparkle in the sun, as well as the high Chapeaus-chinois (military musical instruments) decorated with horses' tails; bells ring and flourishes resound, whilst the air is filled with the peculiarly solemn tone of Turkish trumpets. Still the soldiers continue to arrive, massing themselves in a pre-arranged order, with a perfect precision, and halting suddenly at their post. The nearest, those who take their stand in serried ranks directly below us, against the walls of the Kiosk, are Arnautes from the north of the Empire, and Zouaves of Tripoli in green turbans—splendid men, both in bearing and demeanour, individually and in mass.

Now they are all there, not a movement among them, every man wrapt in thought, for the holy hour of noon is approaching, and soon the ceremony will take place in the Mosque, for which they have all been assembled, the "Selamlike," the great Friday prayer, at which the Sultan will be present in person.

In the room here, there is no feeling of devout silence; diplomatists talk with the wives of ambassadors, or discuss political questions together. Nor is there any in the adjoining room, which is crowded with people, women especially: tourists of different European nationalities to whom, by request of the embassies, the Grand Master of Ceremonies has given permission to come and see the procession of the Selamlike. An aide-de-camp, the most obliging Mehmed-Bey, in long flowing Circassian sleeves, does the honours and shows the fair sight-seers to suitable seats. Will his Majesty, who is to pass here under these very windows, be on horseback or in a carriage? A question that greatly absorbs the spectators, and that is

impossible to answer. Generally, for this short transit of two or three hundred yards between the Palace and the Mosque, the Sultan finds it simpler to get into a carriage while his chargers are led behind, in this case regrettable, for his Majesty looks very fine on horseback, and besides, answers better to our idea of a Khalif than when passing in a landau like any western king.

The time draws near; the marble steps of the Mosque have just been hastily covered with the precious red carpet, on which the Sultan is to place his feet, and on each side of the door, strange Asiatic groups have ranged themselves; long robes, green and yellow and orange, stand out against the snowy whiteness of the walls; dark heads of solemn aspect surmounted by large turbans:—priests deputed from Mecca, from Bagdad, from far distant countries over which the Khalif extends his religious empire, bringing with them a charming touch of the fierce barbarity of ancient times.

Along the sanded avenue, lined by the troops and kept clear by a double row of soldiers, dignitaries of all sorts begin to arrive on their way to the prayer, more especially officers, generals, and marshalls, all the heads of the Turkish Army:—but they are scarcely noticed in the general impatience to see the Sultan pass.

In an elegant closed carriage, the princesses of the Imperial family sweep by, a cloud of muslin concealing their dress and faces.

The sun blazes: in the white rooms, on the white Mosque, in the distances blurred by scintillating reflections and dust, everywhere a glare of light, whilst the presence of these thousands of armed men massed together in silence,

all but holding their breath, seems to augment the oppressive heat.

One by one the great personages invited to the prayer continue to arrive on foot; the Imperial princes, the elders with their aides-de-camp, the children in military costume accompanied by their tutors. Irresistibly charming is a beautiful boy in naval costume covered with crosses, who walks superbly, and turns his delightful intelligent face to the people as he passes. In the tourists' room, where he is not known, women's heads, in flowery hats like May gardens, lean from the window to look at him, and ask: "Who is it?" It is the little Prince Burhan-Eddine, his Majesty's youngest son.

Mid-day approaches. Everyone looks towards the Palace. Watches are consulted—travellers' watches that never agree, being regulated to all the different European times. Through the troops, who rouse themselves and stand erect, there runs a perceptible movement that announces the approach of the sovereign. Amidst the clashing of brass instruments the bands play the Imperial Anthem. And up in the aerial gallery of the white minaret, under the golden crescent, the *mezzin* has just appeared, very small against the sky in the blazing sun. The *mezzin* who is to chant the holy prayer.

Twelve o'clock! Suddenly the music ceases, halts in the middle of a phrase, an unexpected silence falls as though under the oppression of something rather awful. The troops stiffen themselves to a panting immobility. Then the three cries, Allah! Allah! Allah! rising simultaneously from the powerful chests of five thousand soldiers, rend the hot motionless air.

And in the silence that falls again, after the great outburst, the sovereign passes.

He is in a carriage, with Osman Pacha the illustrious hero of Plevna in front of him, and passes quickly, as every head bends.

And from aloft, under the blazing sky, the chant of the *mezzin* falls, the oriental call, the secular call: this marvellous voice, chosen from among all voices, dominates the noise below, covers the military commands and the vague murmuring of so many thousand men. It is fresh, flexible and infinite, something strange, too, in its melancholy hautboy tones. The quick plaintive fugues rise and fall above the human heads, throwing the mystic feeling of Islam, even over the unbelieving strangers assembled there for this unusual sight.

The Khalif, who has descended from his landau, mounts the marble stairs on the red carpet. The oriental dresses and sombre turbans, that were grouped upon the steps, prostrate themselves to the ground. The last notes of the heavenly voice grown plaintive, die on the air—and it is over. The Khalif has passed. Everyone begins to breathe and speak freely again after the religious hush, and conversations are resumed among the cosmopolitan groups in the Kiosk, whilst the beautiful white chargers harnessed in gold are led away.

The moment has been short, but nevertheless, one has felt again with a thrill amid splendid scenic effects, the sweeping past of one of those special beings called Emperors or Kings, in whom great nations are personified.

The Passing of the Queen.

ACTUALLY I live in France, but on a kind of projecting balcony that overlooks Spain. As the windows and terraces of my little home are almost washed by the Bidassoa, I can see and hear all that passes on the opposite shore, which is not in France.

To-day, a lovely day in the height of summer-time, there is suddenly an unexpected commotion among the bells over there: the Church of Fontarabia, the Church of Irun, the monasteries, all peal and peal as for some great festival. Then a large national flag, red with a band of yellow, rises quickly above the Castle of Jeanne-la-Folle, brilliant against the brown, sombre mountains, and the French boats put off hurriedly for Fontarabia, taking people from here evidently to see some sight.

"What is it?" I ask a boatman from my window.

"It's the Queen—the Queen of Spain. We are going to see her pass!"

Of course, I knew that every summer Her Majesty the Queen Regent came from St. Sebastian to make a pilgrimage of several hours to old Fontarabia. Well, supposing I go too, and mix in the crowd of peasants and fishermen to see the Queen pass. I hasten down and take my place in a gay boat-load, in which a troop of young girls and boys exchange merriments in the most ancient and mysterious language in the world, with that full, light roll of the *r* peculiar to Basque words.

Ten minutes on the Bidassoa that sweeps sluggishly along under the brilliant southern sunlight, and we land on the Spanish shore, on the deserted quai of Fontarabia.

The young girls say that it is already late: the Queen will soon leave the Church and go away; one must run.

By a familiar short cut we climb nimbly up between houses built in the darkest middle ages, sinister and dead under the burning sun, and we are soon in the wonderful old street *des Chevaliers*, close to the Church with its walls like a fortress, magnificently emblazoned.

But we are late indeed—hardly in time to doff our caps and open our sun-dazed eyes, before the Queen passes, very quickly, in an open carriage drawn by mules at a galop over the noisy paving stones. She has hardly appeared, hardly been recognised, than she is driving rapidly away, with the infant King at her side, who turns for a moment to look at the Church with his deep young eyes. She is quite simply dressed, this queen, according to the modern custom that requires sovereigns to look as much as possible like their subjects, yet so queenly in appearance, in spite of her attempt at simplicity that in this particular case, there could be no confusion.

I smile at the disappointment of my companions who had hurried over from our France where there are no more kings, in the hope no doubt of admiring a golden dress. Really this strange levelling which sweeps everything away—customs, traditions, dress, pomp and ceremonies—strikes the imagination most forcibly here among the Spanish surroundings of a past still intact, among the grand old houses with their armorial bearings, and with the sound everywhere of those very ancient bells pealing in honour of the Queen.

At the far end of the narrow old street, the Royal carriage is already nearly out of sight, and the country-folk and the fishermen, grouped round the Church, are slow to put on their caps, slow to raise their voices, as if affected by some religious emotion. And yet they are all Carlists by ancient enough tradition; but one feels that even to them the sovereign and mother who has just passed, so unaffected and quiet in her simple dress, commands a sympathy and respect by the mere charm of her presence.

The Moth.

ONE cloudy evening, in my own particular study, that resembles some corner of the east, a gleam of light slips through between the half-drawn curtains, forming a long line in the surrounding obscurity.

From the folds of my red velvet wall hangings, gold embroideries of archaic design, some tiny creature makes its escape, as if drawn towards the dying gleam of light, and once there, flutters impatiently about; a tiny grey moth hardly visible—a wisp of straw with wings, that has doubtless just been hatched in this pale renewing of the year.

A season ago, whilst I was sailing the Chinese seas, it had surely been a horrible little worm, silently devouring the fibre of the precious velvet, in the undisturbed security of my deserted room.

And to-day an entirely new life intoxicated this atom, the small place seemed huge to him, and this semi-darkness, light. This was its hour of youth, of exuberance, its

hour of love, and the goal and crown of its whole inferior larval existence.

Quicker and quicker in the delirium of life it flapped its wings of silken dust to describe those fantastic little curves.

In passing, I knocked it down with a thoughtless flip. There on the ground, on the purple of an oriental carpet, I saw its little battered body again, shaken with the flutterings of death, and out of pity, that it should not suffer further, that it might return to its nothingness, I placed my foot on its microscopic agony.

And then I paused to think a minute. What did this remind me of? Something of the same kind, a similar sort of agitation, a similar intoxicated flutter, had produced in me a brief melancholy of the same nature, but more acute.

Where had I seen it then?

Yes, surely at Constantinople, one evening in April, on the wooden bridge that joins Stamboul to Pera! It was the end of such a Spring day as this, when I was making my way in the mist across a bridge. All the beggars that haunt this spot were at their posts; along the whole length of the balustrade, their familiar figures were grouped, the blind, the lame, and idiots covered with sores. Among the rest was a miserable child, four or five years old perhaps, with shrivelled hands and sore eyes, who sat day by day motionless upon some rags at the edge of the pavement, apathetic and slow as any caterpillar. Behind him crouched his mother, an old woman showing the red stumps of her two legs amputated at the knee.

People passed by, the busy and the idle, on horseback,

and in carriages, men in red fezes, veiled beauties of the harem, and, behind these crowds, Stamboul raised its domes magnificently into the evening sky.

In a voice that was almost sweet, the woman without legs called her little one to her, saying in Turkish: "Come and put on your coat, Mahmoud! Come quickly, for the wind is turning cold."

He rose meekly and went. His coat was a little old sordid Arabian cloak of a greyish colour with undecided stripes, and of the oriental shape with a hood. His mother handed him this rag, and he put out his tiny arms ending in the deformed hands.

But, in a moment, before the second sleeve was on, he escaped in a sudden fit of mischief, and began to run wildly about, describing circles before the passers by, and amusing himself by fluttering the sleeves of his Arabian cloak like wings in the rising wind.

A little of that eternal youth so evanescent, a little of the playful childishness of budding life that is common to man and beasts, had chanced to wake in him. Among his ancestors there must have been, as among everyone else's, beings who were healthy, who knew the joy of physical pleasure, the simple joy of being and of moving: something then of those who had gone before lived again furtively in his frail atrophied flesh.

I watched him in astonishment, having always known him inactive: an infinite sadness possessed me at the sight of his poor little ephemeral attempt at gaiety, his playful sport, the fluttering of his grey cloak in the cold wind and waning light.

His crippled mother became anxious, fearing the horses

and carriages: she called him, and grew angry, trying to drag herself towards him to catch him. But still he whirled in amongst the indifferent groups as they passed, whirled distractedly, like the grey moths of the evening.

He came back however and crouched down at his post of misery, resuming the dejected attitude, and did not move again. It had ended, suddenly, as it had begun.

Something more cruel even than the flip given to the moth had just crushed this already thoughtless little creature: the uncertainty of its shelter and supper that night; the consciousness of being so miserable, so different from others, of having dead hands, and of being a pariah. His head was bent now, and he looked down on the ground with a cunning evil expression, winking his eyes the while.

The association in my mind between him and the moth is even more intimate than I have been able to express.

Profanation.

"THE grave-digger is in the garden, and has come to inform the Commander that the holes are made!"

This sinister sentence is addressed to me by a young sailor with a fresh bright voice, speaking with a Gascon accent.

A Spring morning, a wondrous morning in May, beams on the Basque country. And there is so much fresh life everywhere, so much joy in the air, so much rising sap in the green plants, that death seems a dark improbable dream. Yet, at the gate of my garden so full of roses, there stands the old man just announced—the grave-digger with earth-soiled hands.

It concerns those poor young Breton sailors, youths of twenty, drowned four years ago in the breakers of the Bidassoa, who are to be exhumed to-day. The cemetary where they rested has become too small, too full of the dead—they must be roused and moved. The crew of

their ship, of which I am now in command, has just bought for them a freehold piece of ground where they are all to be laid together. And, as their relations are far away, the care devolves on me of superintending this change of resting-place.

The holes are made. It is time I should go. Following the old remover of the dead, I take the path bordered with daisies and veronicas and wild germander, that leads to the enclosure of perfect peace.

From the top of a hill bordering the Bidassoa, the cemetery overlooks great luminous depths of sea, expanses of water and mountains together, in all conceivable blues, from the very pale to deep intense indigos. The air, which is peculiarly soft to breathe, is full of the scent of hawthorn and lilies. The cemetery is all in bloom, like a private garden where everything grows in profusion; white lilies and old-fashioned flowers raise their long stalks here and there above the tombs; pinks are massed in borders, or spread out in carpets; Easter daisies as bouquets in formal rows; and, above all, quantities of Bengal roses in luxuriant flower, masses of pink, outlined delicately against the distant blue. Surely southern May has thrown an exquisite raiment about this spot, and the weather to-day is exceptional, even here in the south, clearest of the clear, and mild without being oppressive, almost still, with an occasional waft of breeze that passes impregnated with life. In vain has one experienced the illusions of these spring days, one allows oneself to be taken in by them again and again, as one ever will do until old age. One gives oneself up to an intoxication of living, of wellbeing, that seems as if it could never come to an end,

any more than this festival of light and youth that permeates the world this morning, immense, gleaming and soft.

The earth has been dug out, till the rotten planks of of the coffins are laid bare; at this they have stopped, in accordance with my orders; they wait for me before raising the awful lids.

Well, let us begin with *Yvon Gaelo, 22 years of age, top man*, whose name is written in white letters on a meagre little cross of black wood overturned among the pinks and the daisies.

The old grave-digger descends till he disappears between the walls of the freshly-opened grave; another man, his mate, remains above on the brink, waiting attentively.

One stroke of the mattock, and the planks yield and crumble, and amidst a rich soil darker than the rest, hideous remains are brought to light. The grave-digger pulls at something long and blackish: a leg that breaks at the knee and remains in his hand:

"Here," says he to the man above, "they are too far gone; we must take them bit by bit; run home quickly and fetch *the basket!*"

And bending over his work, he scratches about with his nails, picking up the toes one by one, and placing them in a little heap, as if for a game of knuckle-bones.

"I should not have thought they would have been so far gone," he continues, "though they do go more quickly on this side of the cemetery."

Indeed nothing remains but the bones that hardly hold together.

The May sun pours down into this grave as brightly as

on the neighbouring flowers, pours down upon these long buried bones that one would imagine were of a shadowy world, made to move only in the darkness of night, and that one is surprised to find visible in the daylight, so inertly still. The horror one waited for is less of a fact—they differ so little, these bones, from the earth around, whence the roses draw their life.

The osier basket is brought, and the remains are heaped into it. The digger proceeds methodically, working by degrees towards the head of the dead man. Having found the legs, and carefully counted all the toes, he now discovers the larger bones of the trunk entwined by numerous white filaments of some vigorous root.

Still higher up, more horrible than all the rest, is the chest: between the reddish circles that are actually the ribs, is a mass of rottenness, an accumulation of worms. Then, in spite of the smiling sun, in spite of the deluding flowers, a shudder of revolt and of horror passes over us, and even the old man straightens and hesitates.

He makes up his mind at last, however, joins his hands and cleans out the thorax as with a spoon. He is right after all—it is nothing but inoffensive matter, nourishing to those roots, even now almost mould, and that will pass into the branches of the rose trees when next they spring up.

Again, and this time more definitely, the horror of it leaves us; the revolt, the disgust, gives place to a certain grave resignation, and I feel that I too, if needs be, could dare touch such remains as these, at some rural work of cultivation or in the performance of a pious duty. Coming thus, in broad daylight, upon the mystery of subterranean

transformations, to see that a corpse is nothing but this, that at the end of three or four years it is so little human, so akin to the soil and to the stones, has after all something of a tranquilizing effect. It helps one to understand the last wish of certain thinkers, of Alphonse Karr amongst others, to be buried between thin planks—hardly solid, that they might the sooner return to the earth.

Meanwhile they have filled up the basket; some fragments of the sailor's shirt, still recognisable, and his tie, almost intact, have been thrown into it.

Now the man thrusts in a piece of the coffin, and I ask him:

"Why this bit of wood?"

"Oh!" he answers, "for what's stuck to it. Look, it's part of him—his worms," and he turns the plank over to show me a mass of larvae clinging to it underneath.

The sun rises brilliantly in the blue heavens. The hour of noon advances in a calm splendour. From the soil rises a scent of mint, of burnt grass, that will overpower the perfume of all the flowers, of the roses and pinks and gilly-flowers, until the cool of evening. The air seems full of joy; life scatters its thousand forces, and the spring smiles everywhere. Far below, the glistening surface of the sea has covered itself with innumerable little white sails: the whole flotilla of the Fontarabian fishermen sailing gaily out into the open sea in a light breeze. Perched on the walls of the enclosure are little children peering down to see what we are doing, and close to us, two young girls, with Basque handkerchiefs on their heads, quietly watch the piled-up basket.

The old grave-digger continues to search with his fingers.

"Oh!" he exclaims, "look, they are quite right in saying that the corpse always falls to the same side, the head to the left—here is the head; look which way it is turned! Oh! his teeth, how white they are—like milk!"

He picks up the head, raising it dripping and red from the grave into the glare of the sunlight.

"Just look at these teeth, how fine they are. By our Lady, so young too—children like that, and such beautiful children as they were!"

Then turning to the two handsome girls who do not seem in the least impressed, having been watching from mere curiosity, he says:

"I know of more than one girl in the country who wept on the day of their death, I can tell you! At their burial—I can remember it as though it were yesterday—I bet there were more than three hundred people—Ah! the hair now; see, here is the hair!

And on the heap of remains he puts some light bits that look like pale tow.

Meanwhile the basket at the edge of the grave is brimming over, and a mass of black rottenness slips off and falls upon the old grave-digger, on to his neck and down the inside of his shirt.

"Oh!" he murmurs, a little disconcerted, and shakes himself, "I should have preferred him to fall on me, when he was alive. However, it will not kill I am thinking!"

The painful task goes on. Three of the bodies have been dispatched by bits; we are at the fourth, Jean Kergos, *steersman*. Near his leg, at the height where his trouser-pocket might have been, the old man finds a little black thing which he puts down at my feet: a leather

purse, with a metal clasp. The poor fellow, not washed ashore till days after the wreck, was no doubt placed in the coffin as he was.

I have the purse opened. It contains some pieces of silver, some Spanish pence, and some sailor's buttons with needles to sew them on. The lad was careful evidently, one who liked to keep his sailor's clothes in good order. Well, give him back his purse and sewing materials; let them be in the basket with the rest, with his bones and the remains of his flesh. Let us only keep the pieces of silver—he has perhaps some old poverty-stricken mother to whom this last legacy might furnish bread.

When the basket has been filled for the last time, and they carry it away along the green paths over which wild roses trail, I leave the empty graves, and follow. The birds about are singing, and bees hum in the still warm air, fresh withal. I have never seen a more charming day, nor more enchanting weather, nor the spring more full of sweet deluding promises. And the sense of unexpected peace deepens in me, peace from the physical fear of death, from the horror of cemeteries—a resignation to this prompt decay in the earth where the friendly roots penetrate and transform everything.

We come to the single grave that has been prepared to receive them together. Down, into a large case of white wood where the mixed remains of the others are already accumulated, they throw the contents of this fourth basket. Then all that sense of peacefulness goes. The contemplation is awful of all this mass of red bones, of rags of sailor's clothes, of black rottenness and of worms, which was once four young men, four fine sailors. Some reddish balls

—the skulls—stand out in the nameless heap, the head of one between the shin bones of the other in hideous promiscuity, in ridiculous and pitiable disorder.

With some feeling of anxiety I ask myself if we have not, in our pious endeavours, committed the most odious of profanations. Oh! if we could only leave the bodies in peace, there where they are laid—not open tombs—not lay hands on the naked bones!

The Orientals encumber their towns with cemeteries, rather than violate a sepulchre; they divert a road rather than disturb the humblest of the dead. But we—we are far away from such delicate respect!

For those at Sea.

PERHAPS in former days I may have turned a small current of sympathy and of charity towards the heroic race of sailors consecrated, from father to son, to the Iceland fishing. Tears have been shed over the Yanns and over the Sylvestres, over the Gauds and the old grandmother Moans; who are innumerable among these fisher folk. At a time when the sea had made more orphans and widows than usual, my unknown friends generously responded to my appeal, and I had the immense joy of distributing large alms at Paimpol.

And yet they are the happier, these Icelanders who die like Yaun and like the crew of the Leopoldine in the fulness of health and vigor, carried away suddenly by the waves in the midst of a storm.

It is for the still more disinherited that I hold out my hand to-day; for those who are taken ill at sea during the fishing season, on those distant frozen waters; for those who succumb there in awful agony, eternally tossed about

and wet on board uninhabitable boats, where everyone is hopelessly ignorant of what should be done to cure them. These brave fellows have not even the elementary succour that the poorest highway wanderer is sure of finding in the workhouses of France. The mortality through illnesses that are not tended is enormous every year, and it is shocking to think that nothing has been done to lessen it, though it were so easy !

A work has been started with this object. A society has been formed to equip hospital boats to go to the Icelandic seas, and in which invalids will be received—received and nearly always saved, for in general the slightest care and the most ordinary remedies are sufficient to reestablish these robust constitutions.

But money is still wanted by this new society. It should be given now, given to prevent the miserable death of those distant sufferers: young and valiant fathers of families, or sons of widowed women or elder brothers, the support of forsaken nests, or the longed-for of poor affianced brides in white caps.

Carmencita.

TWENTY years alas! have passed since then.

I was quite a young midshipman: I looked like a child attached to the staff of the admiral who was in command of the South Sea station.

I really do not remember who had introduced me to this beloved Carmencita. She lived at Valparaiso, far from the quays and the ships, in a lovely quarter they call the Almendral, her house, with iron-barred windows according to the South American custom, situated in the midst of a garden. She must have been about thirty-five or thirty-six years old, the age when beauty wanes amongst the Spanish women on this coast. To my youthful eyes she seemed already a person of middle age, and indeed she made no secret of her years, in spite of the elegant toilettes that were sent her direct from Paris. "I am such an old maid," she would say.

We were soon bound together by an intimate friendship

in the purest sense of the word. I consecrated my evenings to her, every hour I was spared from duty on board; and every day, in a sweet maternal fashion, she made me conjugate my Spanish verbs. Her fine face, a little yellow and a little—just a little—like parchment, was dominated by wondrous eyes, so long that they seemed never to end, with eyelashes that curled, and corners that, when she smiled, turned up like those of a Chinese. I thought to myself how pretty she must have been. Habitually silent, she would speak in monosyllables, doing the rest with quick flashes of facial expression—a pout or a glance, yet she was witty enough at times, and something of the tease, though quite without malice.

She was very clever at palmistry. I would let her hold my hand for any length of time, in my eagerness to know the future, having always some new question to put to her.

At her house, especially in the evening, as soon as it grew dark, I would feel a sensation of distant exile, in spite of the European hangings and furniture. Perhaps because of that silent isolated quarter in which she lived, and the thought of the long tramp that must be made through the empty streets before reaching those animated quays; and of those two kilometres to be rowed in a boat, often on a rough sea, in order to reach my ship before midnight, for midshipmen on the Chilian coast had not the right to sleep ashore nor even to outstay the hour of Cinderella. Her garden, too, was foreign, yet there were shrubs with small leaves and small flowers which grew there as well as in temperate countries that have a winter, but they were all new to me, and unknown: plants of the southern hemisphere subject to the cold of a winter the inverse of ours.

One of her great means of charming was music. She had wonderful fingers, and would play Listz in a wild delightful manner, mingled with a certain exotic strangeness. I would often ask her to play *habaneras* and *sequidillos* and all kinds of Spanish and Chilian dances. And once, when she was playing one with a rhythm that seemed new to me, I asked her what it was. "That?" she said, "*A Sema Couëque*. The dance of the country; you really didn't know it?"

Later on, I was often to see this *Sema Couëque*, amongst the pretty *Cholas* (half-castes of Spanish and Indian blend). But just then I did not know it. "Oh!" she continued, "very well we will dance it for you." She sent at once for Juanita, Mercedès, and Pilar (fifteen to eighteen years of age) her three nieces who lived at the end of the garden with their mother. When the dancers were in their places, each with a raised arm holding a handkerchief in her hand, she suddenly got up from the piano where she was going to play this *Sema Couëque*: "Oh," she exclaimed, "you had better sing like the *Cholas*, and I will do the tambourine."

The girls sang as they swayed, and she with a changed look—her eyes seemed almost Indian—beat on the resonant wood with her little dry hands, that surely had become sticks, marking the jerky pang! pang! pang! of the *Sema Couëque*.

That the evening might be complete, they even served *mathé*, a traditional South American infusion that one drinks through a reed tube.

I did not take long to learn. And it became a habit to end our evenings, when Pilar, Mercedès and Juanita

always came in, with a "Suppose we dance *Sema Couëque*." Once, on the eve of leaving Chili and of starting for Polynesia, I wanted her to dance herself:

"Oh!" she said, "such an old maid as I! Really, Pilar, can I possibly do what he asks?"

"Monsieur," answered Pilar, "no one in Valparaiso dances like Aunt Carmencita."

With a grace that was supple and light, she began to dance. At first her slender figure swayed from the hips which scarcely moved, shaken only by a slight rhythmic motion. Then suddenly she started off, as if lifted up by the strange cadence, and whirled round. Then for the first time it seemed to me that she was young.

We saw each other again, ten months later on my return from Oceania. A short and melancholy stay before my departure for France—the long farewell. I found her aged—especially after the young Tahitians whom I had just left. In my absence her hair had become mixed with silver threads, and one of her pretty teeth had been filled with gold.

In the garden the austral plants were losing their leaves: we were in April—the beginning of Autumn there.

We parted, promising to write to one another.

Then, in time, the letters grew scarce, and somehow at last ceased. Twenty-three years is such an eternity!

My thoughts of the South Seas, of Valparaiso, of the Almendral became more and more rare. She is old now, I would say to myself, my poor Carmencita, bent perhaps and grey haired.

And now, last night I dreamt of her. I saw the house again at the Almendral, the old drawing-room in the grey

twilight, Carmencita in an arm-chair, grown white and decripid. I said, "Suppose we dance a *Sema Couëque!*" With a sad gesture she showed me the old lady cloaks and shawls in which she was wrapped up to the chin.

Then in my dream the hour suddenly struck when I had to go back on board my frigate which was leaving. It was already late. I had a long way to go through the dark town, through the poor quarter where many *Cholas*, mocking and laughing, were dancing the *Sema Couëque*; their bare arms, holding out the handkerchief, met at every moment to bar my way and retard my progress. At last the vision melted out into the silent night of nothingness, as I reached the borders of a sombre sea where no one danced any more.

This morning, when I awoke to real life again, I found the memory of Carmencita very vivid, as invariably happens when one has dreamt of anybody. It made me especially melancholy to think of her faded beauty, and of her figure that had now lost its grace. And it was for the first time, after twenty-three years, like the rousing of some tender emotion that lurks unconsciously at the root of all friendship with women when they are beautiful or have scarcely ceased to be so.

The Opposite Wall.

EIGHT at the end of a court, the three lived together in a modest abode, the mother and daughter and a maternal relation (an aunt), already advanced in years, whom they had just received into their home.

The daughter was still quite young, still in the ephemeral freshness of her eighteen years—when they were obliged, through reverse of fortune, to shut themselves up in the most retired corner of their ancestral home. The rest of the beloved abode, all the bright side that looked on to the street, must needs be let to desecrating strangers, who changed the aspect of the old place and destroyed its associations.

An executive sale had despoiled them of the more luxurious furniture of the old days; they arranged their new little drawing-room with rather incongruous things: relics of their ancestors, odds and ends collected from the lofts and store-rooms of the house. But they had loved it at once, this humble room, which now for years to come

was to unite all three around the same fire and the same lamp in the winter evenings: a comfortable room with a homely and cosy look, somewhat enclosed it is true, yet without giving any impression of gloominess, for the windows, simply draped in muslin curtains, looked out on to a sunny court, where low walls were decked with honeysuckle and roses.

Happy in this modest room, they were already beginning to forget the comfort and the luxury of former times, when one day a communication was made to them which caused the deepest consternation. The new owner was to build two stories on to his abode; a wall was to rise up there before their windows, taking away the air and hiding the sun.

And no way alas! of averting this evil that struck home more acutely than all the foregoing reverses of fortune.

To buy up the neighbour's house (an easy matter in the days of their past prosperity) was not to be thought of now! There was nothing to be done, in their poverty, but to bow the head.

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So the wall began to spring up, layer by layer; they watched it rise with anguish, and a mournful silence reigned in the little sitting-room that grew more gloomy day by day, in proportion as the dark thing rose up. And to think that it, growing ever higher, would soon replace the depths of blue sky, or the golden clouds against which the low wall stood out in relief with its covering of branches!

In a month the masons had finished their work: a

smooth surface of hewn stone painted a greyish-white, very much like a November sky, perpetually opaque, monotonous and dead; and in the summers that followed, the rose trees and the shrubs of the court became etiolated in its shadow.

The hot June and July sun still penetrated the sitting-room, though more tardily in the morning, disappearing quickly in the evening; the dusks of late autumn fell an hour earlier, followed at once by a pervading grey gloom.

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And time passed: the months and seasons went by. As the light waned in the nondescript hours of the evening when one by one the three women put down their embroidery or their sewing before lighting the lamp, the young girl—who would soon have ceased to be young—always raised her eyes towards that wall, which stood there instead of the sky of former days; and with a kind of childish melancholy, that came upon her constantly like the mania of a prisoner, she would amuse herself by looking, from a certain place, at the branches of the rose trees and the tops of the shrubs against the grey background of painted stones, and by trying to imagine that this background was a sky, a sky rather lower and nearer than the real one, as the kind that weighs down upon the distorted visions of a dream at night.

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They had the hope of inheriting some money, and often spoke of it, round the lighted lamp at their work-table, as of a fairy tale, so far away did it seem.

But when they should have it—this American succession—at no matter what price, they would buy the neighbour's house in order to pull down all the new part, to re-establish things as they were in the old times, and to give back to their court, to their dear roses the sun of former days. To throw down this wall had become their one terrestrial desire, the one thought continually in their minds.

And the old aunt would say:

"My dear children, God grant that I may live long enough to see that happy day!"

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It was long in coming, this inheritance of theirs.

The rain in time had made black stripes on the smooth surface, sad to see, forming a kind of V, or the blurred outline of a bird hovering. And the young girl gazed on it for a long time every day, every day.

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Once, in a very hot Spring when, in spite of the shadow of the wall, the roses had bloomed earlier and more profusely than usual, a young man appeared at this end of the court and for several evenings sat at the table with these three ladies of meagre fortunes. He was passing through the town, and had brought introductions from mutual friends, not without a thought of marriage. He was good looking, with a proud face bronzed by the great sea breezes.

But he thought the inheritance too chimerical. She was not rich enough, this young girl, whose cheeks were moreover, beginning to grow pale for want of light.

He departed to return no more, he, who had represented, for a time, sun and strength and life. And she, who had already considered herself his betrothed, felt at his departure a sudden inward sense of death.

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And the monotonous years continued their course like impassable rivers; five went by, ten, fifteen and even twenty. The portionless girl lost her freshness little by little—this freshness that was so useless and despised; the mother's hair turned white; the old aunt became infirm, with shaking head, an octogenarian in a faded armchair, eternally seated in the same place, near the darkened window, her venerable profile outlined against the foliage of the court, below that background of smooth wall, where unwonted marks in the shape of a bird, traced by the slowly dripping rain, were becoming more accentuated.

In the presence of the wall, of the inexorable wall, they all three grew old. And the rose trees and shrubs grew old too, with the less sinister age of plants that seem to grow young again each Spring.

"Oh! my children, my poor children," the aunt still continued to murmur in her cracked voice that no longer finished the sentences, "if only I live long enough——."

And her bony hand pointed with a menacing gesture to the oppressive stone thing.

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She had been dead for ten months. They had wept for her as for the dearest of grandmothers. Her absence from the little sitting-room had left an unspeakable void

in the lives of these recluses, and then, the inheritance came, came when they were no longer thinking of it, with a shock at last.

The old maid—she had reached forty now—felt quite young in the joy of possessing a fortune once more.

They would get rid of the tenants, of course, they would reinstate themselves; but from preference they would generally occupy the little sitting-room of their humbler days: in the first place it was now full of associations, and then, it would regain its sunny cheerfulness as soon as they had taken down the imprisoning wall that was now nothing but a useless eyesore, easy enough to destroy with a battery of golden sovereigns.

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At last it took place, this pulling down of the wall. For twenty mournful years they had desired its destruction. Now, on an April day, with the first warm breezes and the first long evenings, the thing was accomplished, quite easily amidst the noise of falling stones and clouds of dust and the singing of the workmen.

And towards the end of the second day, when all was finished, when the labourers had gone, and silence reigned again, they found themselves once more seated at their table, mother and daughter, astonished at seeing so clearly and having no need of the lamp to begin their evening meal. As in a strange return to former days, they saw the rose trees in their court once more against the sky. But instead of the joy they had expected, they felt at first an indefinable uneasiness: there was too much light, all at once, in their little room, a sort of resplendent sadness,

and the sense of an unaccustomed void outside, of an immense change. No words came to them in the presence of the accomplishment of their dream; each was absorbed; a growing melancholy took hold of them, they remained there without speaking, without touching the repast that was served. Little by little, as their two hearts contracted more, it grew into a veritable distress, like one of those dark and hopeless regrets caused by death.

When at length the mother perceived that her daughter's eyes were filling with tears, and devined the unexpressed thoughts that were surely the same as her own, she said:

"It could be rebuilt. It seems to me that they could try, could they not, to make it just the same?"

"I was thinking of that too," answered the daughter. "But no, you see; *it could never be the same!*"

Heavens! could it possibly be? Had she indeed, she herself decreed the annihilation of that familiar background, the background before which, one spring, she had seen the handsome face of a certain young man, and for so many winters the venerated profile of the old aunt now dead.

And all at once, as she remembered the vague design in the form of a shadowy bird, traced there by drops of rain, and which she would never, never, never see again, her heart was still more piteously torn; she wept the bitterest tears of her life over the irreparable destruction of that wall.

An Old Missionary of Annam.

OVER there, in the benighted yellow country of the Far East, during the war, our ship, a cumbrous ironclad, was stationed for weeks at her blockading post, in one of the bays along the shore.

With the neighbouring land—mountains of a miraculous green, or rice-fields smooth like plains of velvet—we rarely communicated. The inhabitants of the villages and of the woods, kept aloof, suspicious or hostile. An overwhelming heat fell upon us from a heavy sky that was generally grey, veiled by a perpetual curtain of lead.

One morning, during my watch, the steersman on the look out came and said to me: "There's a *sampan*, Captain, coming from the end of the bay, and which looks as though it were making for us."

"Oh! and what is there in it?"

Being uncertain, he looked through the glasses again, before answering:

"There's a sort of . . . bonze, Captain, a Chinaman, I don't quite know what, who is seated all alone in the stern."

Slowly and silently, the *sampan* approached over the smooth water oily and hot. A young girl of yellow complexion, dressed in black, stood rowing our ambiguous visitor, who certainly wore the costume, the headdress and the round eyeglasses of a priest of Annam, but who had a beard and a strange face not in the least Asiatic.

He came on board and addressed me in French, speaking in a timid and glum way.

"I am a missionary," he said, "I come from Lorraine, but I have lived for more than thirty years here, in a village about six hours inland, where they have all become Christian. I wished to speak to the Commandant to ask him for help. The rebels have threatened us, and are already close upon us. It is certain that all my parishioners will be massacred if we do not get help at once!"

Alas! the Commandant was obliged to refuse the help requested. All our men and guns had been sent elsewhere; at that moment we had only just the necessary number of sailors left to manage the ship; really we could do nothing for those poor "parishioners," and must leave them to their fate.

The oppressive hour of noon approached, with its daily torpor that suspends all life. The little boat and the young girl had gone back to shore, and had just disappeared among the unhealthy verdure of the coast.

The missionary had remained, and was naturally a little taciturn, though uncomplaining. The poor man was hardly brilliant during the breakfast he shared with

us. He had become so Annamite that all conversation seemed impossible with him. After coffee, when the cigarettes appeared, he grew a little more animated, and asked for some French tobacco to fill his pipe; for twenty years, he said, such a pleasure had been denied him. After which, excusing himself on the plea of the long journey he had made, he fell asleep on the cushions.

We should probably have to keep this unexpected guest, whom the heavens had sent us, for several months, till a reconciliation could be effected. I confess it was without any enthusiasm that one of us went at last to speak to him on the part of the Commandant.

"A room has been prepared for you, Father. It is unnecessary to say that you will be one of us until the day when we can deposit you in a safe place."

He appeared not to understand.

"But—I was only waiting for night to ask you for a little boat to take me back over there, to the end of the bay. You can surely put me ashore before night, at least?" he continued anxiously.

"Ashore! And what will you do ashore?"

"I will return to my village," he said with a simplicity that was quite sublime. "Oh! I cannot sleep here, you understand. Supposing the attack were to be to-night!"

With each word he seemed to grow bigger, this soul who had appeared so ordinary at first sight; we began to surround him with interested curiosity.

"Yet, you will be the last they will spare, Father?"

"Oh! yes, that is quite probable," he answered, calm and splendid as an old martyr.

Ten of his parishoners awaited him on the shore, at sunset; together they would return at night to the threatened village, and then, God's will be done!

And when he was pressed to stay—for it would be going to his death, to some atrocious Chinese death, if he returned there after this refusal of help—he grew gently indignant, obstinate, immovable, but with no grand phrases, and with no anger.

"It was I who converted them, and you wish me to abandon them when they are persecuted for their faith? But they are my children, you understand! . . ."

Not a little moved, the officer on watch ordered one of our boats to row him back, and we all went up to shake hands when he left. Still unperturbed, quietly, grown once more insignificant and silent, he entrusted us with a letter to an old relative in Lorraine, took a small provision of French tobacco, and started on his way.

As the day drew in, we stood for a long time silently watching the outline of this apostle gliding over the hot, oily sea into the distance, where he was going quite simply to an obscure martyrdom.

We set sail the following week for I forget where, and from that time forth, we were buffeted by events without intermission. We never heard anything more of him, and I think, for my part, I should never have thought of him again, if Monseigneur Morel, the director of Catholic Missions, had not begged me one day to write *a little Missionary Story*.

Three Days War in Annam.

I.

On Board.

August 17th, 1883.

THE whole Squadron is assembled in the Bay of Tourane. An attack on the forts and on the town is to be made to-morrow.

No communication with land. The day is spent in preparation. The thermometer shows 33·5 in the wind and in the shade. High mountains surround the bay, recalling the Alps minus their snow. In the distance, on a sandy promontory, one can see the town of Tourane: a collection of low huts made of wood and of reeds.

On board we are busy equipping the companies that are to disembark, giving to each man his ration, ammunition knapsack, gun-strap, etc., even making them try on their shoes. The sailors are as merry as great children at

the thought of going on shore to-morrow, and the preparations are carried on in absolute hilarity.

Yet, sunstrokes and fevers have already made many ravages amongst them; brave fellows, who quite lately were brisk and strong, walk about with bowed head and drawn yellow faces.

In the afternoon a small boat arrives from shore, with some mandarins dressed in black, one of them shaded by an immense white parasol. They go on board the flagship to confer, and then return as they came.

At five o'clock, a meeting and consultation of the captains on board the *Bayard*. Storm and rain in torrents.

The sailors pass the evening in singing, more gaily than usual. One even hears the shrill sound of the *binion* (a kind of bagpipe) that some Bretons have brought with them.

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Saturday, August 18th.

At nine o'clock in the morning, in superb weather, the Squadron, *Bayard*, *Atalante*, *Annamite*, *Chateau-Renaud*, *Diac*, *Lynx*, *Vipère*, steams out in file from the Bay of Tourane through a legion of fishermen's junks, that have sails like the wings of butterflies, and makes its way towards Hué, the capital of Annam.

At twenty minutes past two, the Squadron arrives at the mouth of the river Hué. In the foreground, a sandy coast sparkling in the sun, green plumed cocoa-trees and houses with arched Chinese roofs, and a solitary great fort visible, guarding the entrance to the river, where the sea breaks.

The Squadron approaches with precaution, taking soundings, and anchors as near as possible, hoisting the French flags, and bringing the guns to bear in order to commence the bombardment.

The fort replies bravely, hoisting the yellow flag of Annam. It looks like a modern fort, well constructed and protected by casemates, though there are no cannons to be seen. Some persons appear at the embrasures, and seem to lounge about and look calmly at us; no doubt their resistance will not be serious, we expect to see them fly at the first gun-shot.

Above the brilliant line of the sands, the mountains form a blurred back ground, rising high into the heavens, sombre against the great luminous blue.

5.30 in the evening.

The first shell thrown by the *Bayard* gives the signal to fire. It falls right on to the Annamite fort, raising a red cloud of sand and of gravel. From every ship in the Squadron a regular systematic bombardment begins, each one aiming at the precise spot pointed out to her yesterday. Several minutes elapse, and nothing stirs on shore; apparently the Annamites have fled.

Then suddenly little rapid lights flash from the embrasures of the fort, accompanied by white smoke; it is the reply: they are firing on us.

There are after all a great many cannons, little batteries, that we did not see, arranged all along the coast in the sand, and that keep up a constant firing.

But they are round balls that do not carry sufficiently far to reach us. They fall half-way, making eddies in

the water. Only our advice boats, which have approached nearer, could receive a chance hit or two—the ironclads are too far off and watch them coming without fear; we can see them hit the water, rebound like a child's ball, and then disappear.

Soon great red flames begin to rise behind the fort of Thouane-An; it is a fire caused by our shells, some villages that are burning over there; the fire gains ground quickly, and rises high into the air with a thick smoke.

The bombardment continues. In spite of the rolling that spoils our aim, shells pour down upon the Annamites, capsizing everything; but still they hold out and precipitate their fire. Assuredly they are brave.

Seven o'clock in the evening.

It is almost dark; the glare of the burning village alone guides us in our aim. Thick clouds have gathered on the mountains of Annam; they form a huge black background over which the lightning wanders; down below, on the level of the sea, ever the rapid little flashes of the cannons firing on us. A great yellow moon, which rises amidst a confusion of clouds, sheds hardly any light; one can no longer see anything at all. The Admiral gives the signal to cease firing, and all is silent.

But the Annamites have responded up to the last, with an unexpected force of resistance, and the flags of King Tu-Duc still fly on the shore.

To-morrow morning, Sunday, at daybreak, we are to attempt a landing by main force; they have prepared the bridges and rafts of bamboo, all the necessary apparatus. The sailors are still carried away by a careless excitement;

but the more thoughtful are somewhat preoccupied by the thought of this sudden attack by so few men, amidst the breakers, on a coast protected by cannon and soldiers. Seen close at hand, it appears less easy than it did yesterday, when talked over at Tourane.

. . . . . .

Sunday, August 19th.

Hammocks up! at four o'clock in the morning. The companies who are to disembark quickly seize their arms, their ammunition and their rations. Field-pieces and quick firers are lowered into the boats.

Half-past five.

Counter-orders from the Admiral, the landing is deferred. Some whalers belonging to the Squadron have been to shore in the night to examine the breakers, which are too dangerous to-day. Before sunrise the men are disarmed, the landing apparatus stowed away, and, as though nothing had happened, the great traditional Sunday washing begins on all the ships.

At daybreak, the air is so clear that the minutest details of everything on land can be distinguished, even far into the distance.

Telescopes search the country up the river Hué: great trees, green palms, and, from distance to distance, Annamite flags, indicating forts and batteries. Nothing can be seen of the town, where, it is said, the head of poor Commandant Rivière is still exposed in the public place, at the end of a pole.

Now there is a movement among the troops on the sandy shore. People come out of the fort of Thouane-An

which we bombarded yesterday; they are clothed in black and wear great white Chinese hats, like mushrooms, on their heads: their weapons glisten in the sun: they are soldiers belonging to the regular army of King Tu-Duc. They begin to cross the river on a ferry in order to concentrate themselves opposite in a fort on the south bank. The *Bayard* throws out shells; the result is a panic, a falling into the water; they are seen running like madmen on the sand. But the movement still goes on, and the Annamite forts begin to answer us.

This morning, to our surprise, their projectiles reach us, and whistle through the air with a noise similar to our own. They have evidently been shot from rifled barrels. They had none of these yesterday, and must have put them up during the night.

A shot goes through the mast of the *Vipère*, another indents the iron sheeting of the *Bayard*, and strikes a sailor on the chest. Then, at a signal from the Admiral, the general bombardment begins again.

There is no rolling to-day; the perfectly aimed guns of the Squadron bear full on the Annamite batteries, which must be smashed. Each one of our shots raises a whirlwind of sand and of stones. Their fire does not hold out ten minutes. At the end of half-an-hour we cease ours, as the land no longer replies.

It is eleven o'clock. This will be a day of rest for the sailors, who have need of it; on board, the well-known whistle is given: "Men to hammocks, games allowed!" The batteries of the Squadron, dirtied by the powder, the smoke, and the muddy water of the mops, have not their usual aspect, their pleasant Sunday cleanliness; but to-day

they are swept by a goodly sea-breeze, not too hot and very refreshing. Instead of taking their sacks, the sailors, tired out by several days of excessive work and of long watches, lie flat down on the boards and fall asleep. The ships become as silent as great dormitories.

At eight o'clock in the evening, council of war on board the *Bayard*. The breakers have greatly subsided: the Annamite forts, twice bombarded, can no longer be in a condition to offer a long resistance; the disembarkation is decided on for to-morrow morning, and the sailors retire quickly to their hammocks in order to have a short time for sleep before the call of "hammocks up," which is to be sounded at four o'clock.

The officers of the landing corps are designated in advance, according to certain fixed rules, relating to their seniority and their duties on board; those who have to remain behind for the management of the ships, and the service of the batteries, are accordingly prepared for the deprivation, and accept it without a murmur.

For the sailors there is more liberty of choice; many topmen, who were not originally selected, have succeeded to-day in substituting themselves for others less keen, and are to go in their stead. It is a question, to-morrow morning, of taking possession of the whole left bank of the river Hué, which is the most seriously fortified portion of the coast.

Independently of the little batteries erected here and there on the sand, there is the great circular fort to the south, which guards the entrance to the river with forty embrasures for cannon; then, the battery of the Rice Magazine, and lastly, continuing in a north-westerly

direction, the fort furthest to the north. All more or less injured by our shells, but no doubt repaired during the night, and still capable of opening fire.

A splendid night. The ships of the Squadron sweep the coast with great jets of electric light which must somewhat frighten the Annamites. Meanwhile the French whaling boats sound the entrance to the river and explore the breakers on the shore.

. . . . . .

Monday, August 20th. Four o'clock, a.m.

"All hammocks up!"—Night is over. The landing corps breakfasts hastily, arms itself, takes its ammunition and two days' rations. A few hand-shakes, a few words of advice exchanged between those who are going and those remaining behind: then the boats are manned. All the guns of the Squadron are pointed to the shore, ready to open fire.

5.30 a.m.

At daybreak, the French flags are hoisted at the top of every mast; the uproar of bombardment begins again. The land makes no response. The sand-hills form a white line all along the horizon; and high above, the violet outline of the Annam mountains cuts into the brightening sky.

5.50 a.m.

The whole flotilla of little boats gets under weigh. The weather is very clear, absolutely calm. The sun rises amongst little golden clouds. Day has broken suddenly, as is the way in tropical countries. Every detail of the mountains stands out accentuated in pink and blue.

Above the sand-hills one can see the green cocoanut trees, the batteries, the villages, the pagodas, the houses with their carved roofs. In all this nothing stirs, and our shells seem to fall on a deserted country.

6.20 a.m.

The companies, disembarked from the *Bayard* and the *Atalante*, reach the shore, and get wet through as they begin to land amidst the breakers. There is a moment of anxiety: from the ships of the Squadron, rows of Annamite heads are plainly visible appearing above the sand-hills, though they cannot be seen by the sailors who are landing; these men are awaiting them there behind the trenches. The *Lynx*, which is nearest to shore, greets them with a volley of fire which appears to cut down about twenty; the rest conceal themselves.

The landing is effected close to the North fort, opposite a village. Suddenly, from behind the sand-hills, there comes a shower of flaming shells with a few projectiles and pieces of iron. No one is wounded. The shells are practically harmless, and fall softly on to the sand like little meteors. The sailors make a rush for the sand-hills, meet the Annamites in the trenches, fire upon them, then charge them with bayonets. Instantly, the whole yellow troop is in flight. A thousand men, perhaps, fly before a handful of sailors. The *Atalante* company make a rush on the North fort. Some Annamites come hurriedly out, advance, fire without killing anyone, then draw back and take to flight.

6.40 a.m.

The *Atalante* company is in the North fort. The Annamite flag is lowered and the first French flag hoisted

in its place by Lieutenant Poidloüe, in command of the company. The sailors pursûe the Annamites towards the north-west.

7.0 a.m.

The Artillery and the first group of Marine Infantry have landed. The boats return for the second transport. Another Annamite battery, established in the sand, opens fire on the *Vipère* which replies. The shells have set fire to the north village, that begins to blaze.

7.30 a.m.

The Annamite battery of the Rice Magazine opens fire. The shells have caused another fire, a magnificent one, this: village, pagoda, everything, burning with immense red flames and whirlwinds of smoke.

7.40 a.m.

The second detachment of Marine Infantry has landed; all the Artillery is disembarked and mounted on the crest of the sand-hills. The French troops mass themselves on the shore, facing south, and prepare to march against the great forts.

7.50 a.m.

A shell from the Squadron has set fire to the circular fort to the south. All the French troops are massed; the Artillery opens fire on the forts. Towards the north, every house is burning.

8.0 a.m.

The French troops divide and advance towards the south.

8.35 a.m.

The first French detachments arrive, in small numbers, at the Rice Magazine, and keep up a continuous firing.

8.40 a.m.

They retreat a few steps and take shelter: the circular fort is firing on them. The Squadron accelerates the bombardment.

8.45 a.m.

The landing corps signals from shore to the Admiral's ship (by means of flags hoisted on a pole):

"Please, cease firing on the forts." The Admiral's ship answers by signalling to the Squadron: "Cease fire!"

8.50 a.m.

For a moment the hearts of those who watch from on board stand still: the Annamites make a general sortie from the Rice Magazine, and pour a rapid fire upon the first French detachment which retreats and throws itself down on the sand.

8.55 a.m.

They breathe again on board. All the French are on their feet. Evidently no one is hurt for they all run; they run towards the Annamites without giving them time to reload their guns. Moreover, reinforcements of sailors and of soldiers of the Marine Artillery come up from behind. The Annamites take to their heels, fly towards the south, and take refuge in a cluster of houses over which their flag is flying. The French pursue them.

9.0 a.m.

From the Squadron, it is difficult to see what is happening amongst the houses and the trees. Sharp fusilading is heard, and the flag of Annam falls. The French continue to run forward towards the circular fort to the

south. The sun is rising high in the heavens, and the heat becomes terrible.

9.5 a.m.

One can hear the French Artillery, which has reached Thouane-An (the last village to the south) firing quite close to the circular fort. The village of Thouane-An is set alight by the first shot, and flares like a huge bonfire of straw.

9.10 a.m.

Simultaneously from two sides, the French have entered the great circular fort which the Squadron's shells have already filled with dead. The remaining Annamites who had taken refuge there, make their escape, climbing over the walls, like madmen: some take to the water, others try to cross the river in boats, or by the ford, in order to take refuge on the south bank. Those who are in the water try naïvely to protect themselves with mats, osier shields, or pieces of iron sheeting. The sailors, out of pity, cease firing, and allow them to escape; there will be corpses enough in the fort to clear away this evening before they can get to rest.

The great yellow flag of Annam, that has been flying for two days. is lowered, and the French flag hoisted in its place. All is at an end; the entire north bank is taken, swept over and burnt. In a word, a glorious morning's work, admirably carried out.

On the Annamites' side, about six hundred dead strew the roads and the villages.

On our side, scarcely a dozen wounded, not one killed, not one even seriously hurt.

9.15 a.m.

On board the *Bayard*, the flagship, the sailors are made to man the rigging and shout: "Hurrah!"—Every ship of the squadron follows suit.

And then a general calm reigns. All retire to rest, at any rate till the evening.

The troops on land signal for wine and for water which are sent, and then they install themselves in the shade.

One was admirably placed on board for following from above, as on a map, the movements of the attack. Now, with telescopes, all the details could be distinguised, everything that passed, the very costumes, and attitudes of the men.

A topman walks solemnly along the shore under a great mandarin parasol.

A sailor, who is carrying a barrel, comes across an Annamite feigning death on the sands, and shakes a finger at him, as one does to a street urchin. The Annamite humbly chin-chins to him, and kisses his feet, begging for mercy.

The sailor has a kind heart and allows himself to be softened.

But, look here, you'll have to carry my barrel.

He puts the thing on the man's shoulders and makes him follow like a groom.

There is not a breath of air. The oppression of noon falls on everything. The motionless sea reflects the heat like a mirror. The line of sand-hills in the sun is of a dazzling white; two or three Annamite bodies lie on the sand; some sheep and pigs, frightened by the burning villages, run over them; a poor dog, who has evidently

no master, rushes wildly to the right and to the left, as though he had lost his head. Behind the sands, the mountains of Annam fade away in a kind of hot haze, and the blue of the heavens appears tarnished by the heat.

Nothing can be heard. But the villages are still burning with long, red flames; their smoke rises straight up to an astonishing height, so still is the air; in the midst of all the dazzling blue, they look like gigantic black columns.

Another slight cannonade towards three o'clock in the evening. The Squadron has changed its moorings and has taken up a position opposite the mouth of the river. The Annamite forts on the south bank of the river fire on *Vipère* and the *Lynx* which are moored quite close to the bar, to be in readiness to cross it to-morrow morning. The Squadron answers, and the firing ceases.

The night is absolutely calm. All along the coast can be seen the glare of the Annamite villages, which burn in the moonlight until morning.

Around these fires, many curious things must take place. But they are far off, and from on board nothing more can be seen.

II.

On Land: In the Camp of the Sailors of *The Atalante*. Night of August 20th.

7 p.m.

Night already ! Near a small fire that is burning on the ground, two officers of the Squadron are seated in gilded armchairs of Asiatic form;—it is in the enclosure of a fort, on the sand, amidst a wreck of broken pots, of rags and fragments of all kinds.

Behind them is a tent that has been hurredly made with the first things that came to hand : old sails, bits of yellow flag or draperies of embroidered silk ; the whole supported by lances, broken oars, sticks of bamboo, or standard poles speckled with gold.

Sailors come and go in the darkness, marauding for supper; their footsteps make no noise on the sand, and they do not talk at all; affected by the general silence that seems to lie heavily on everything as the night falls.

These sumptuous details—the tent and the lances, the gildings, in the midst of the havoc—assume in the night a false air of grandeur. Vaguely it all makes one think of events long past, the pillages and invasions of Ancient Asia.

And the two officers, who are seated in their chairs of state confide to one another this feeling that has come

upon them, laughing at themselves as they talk of it, making fun of the whole idea, as men do who are used to incongruous situations, with the modern spirit that jokes at everything. At heart, really, they have a feeling, which they rather enjoy, of watching in some camp of Attila's or of Tchengiz. And the comparison is a fair one, for though the epoch is different, and the names too, the events in themselves are similar.

Still it is impossible to carry on the conversation cheerfully. Without knowing why they relapse into silence. Their thoughts wander over the whole region, now in darkness, that surrounds the low walls of the fort and is strewn with the long-haired dead. Truly a peculiar look is given to the bodies of the soldiers by those masses of wiry hair.

In this silence and calm a thousand details come back to one, a clearer conception of things is gained, and one is beset suddenly by the horror of what had to be done.

Slowly, hour by hour, one goes through the whole succession of that hard day's events.

First, the risky landing at dawn amongst the breakers on the shore: the sailors, waist deep in water, shaken by the waves, stumbling, wetting their ammunition and their weapons. A bad beginning. Then the safe arrival of all on the sands in spite of the shot and the shower of bombs fired from above by invisible persons, hidden behind the sandhills. Quickly they had begun to mount and run, keeping dead silence. And then, suddenly, in a line of trenches wonderfully laid, and apparently surrounding the whole peninsula, they had come upon the watching enemy, crouching like Saturnine rats in their sandholes: yellow

men of extreme ugliness, lean, ragged, miserable, scantily armed with lances and old rusty guns, and white lampshades on their heads. They had not looked like dangerous enemies; one dislodged them with the butt end of the rifles or with bayonets.

Some had fled towards the north, dropping their provisions, their little baskets of rice, their portion of betel. . . . And all this that had happened very, very quickly —in a few seconds—floated through the mind now with a lengthiness and precision of detail that was strange.

Then the superior officer in command of the landing corps had given the order to the *Atalante* company to climb to the end of the sandhill and take possession of the fort on the right, over which floated the yellow flag of Annam.

They climbed the hill at a run, somewhat in disorder; the sailors once started, went at it like children. Then suddenly they had stopped, retreating a few steps. A new trench filled with human heads! All those faces had risen up together, under a row of Chinese hats like lampshades; their little eyes with turned-up corners looked out with a false, ferocious expression, dilating with intense life, and paroxysms of rage and terror.

It was these they had seen from the Squadron, and had watched anxiously through telescopes.

They were not in the least like the poor wretches of the lower trench; they were fine, vigorous, thick-set men, square military heads, the true Hun's head, with long hair and small pointed Mongolian beards.

Correctly equipped, carrying their provision of bullets in small baskets slung over the arm, like housewives going

to market, they remained there, barring the road, waiting without moving or speaking: they were the regulars of Annam, and they must have been brave to have held out since yesterday under the terrible fire of the shells.

Badly armed, it is true; but it was impossible to judge of that on first sight; lances ornamented with tufts of red cloth, large and terrible cutlasses set in hafts, and rifles on which bayonets were fixed.

A moment's hesitation and fear amongst these great excited children—our sailors—caused no doubt by surprise at the sight of those yellow heads, of those strange physiognomies they had never seen, met there face to face, emerging from their sandy hole.

It is a serious thing when such fright takes hold of one. The men of Annam had straightened themselves still more, as though ready to leave their holes. The moment became supreme. There were scarcely thirty who had reached the top in the presence of all these yellow men; the rest were only half way up, too far off to support them.

And, as it happened, in spite of their manly appearance and their square figures, these sailors of the leading section were very young, nearly all children of about twenty years, Breton fishermen who had left their village last Spring, and who had never seen an affair of the kind. They had been told about traps, of the holes furnished with points that the Chinese conceal for your steps; they had even been given knotted cords, and shown the trick of these snares and how to escape from them. And they remembered those things, and the head of Commandmant Rivière stuck on the end of a spike, and the death of the

tortured prisoners. Yes, they were really somewhat afraid.

The ship's lieutenant in command of this company from the *Atalante* had shouted "forward!" and had quickly said all he could to encourage them. He had a plucky second mate with him, Jean Louis Balcon, who had fought in China and who, on his side, had done his utmost to encourage the left wing by a quick, quaint seaman's harangue. And the heads that watched from behind the trench opened their little slanting eyes, hesitating still, and wondering whether the moment had yet come to rush upon these Frenchmen.

All this, which takes so long to tell, had not lasted two minutes. But, from the Squadron, they had seen that movement of hesitation too, and had watched it with great anxiety.

At last, the sailors had been suddenly carried away, whether by some more inspiriting word, or by a sense of rage or of duty, I cannot tell. They threw themselves headlong, with a shout, upon the men of Annam.

These latter had expected an attack of cold steel, having seen the glitter of the French bayonets. But no, the muskets were loaded up, it was the fierce repeating fire, the quick, devastating volley on volley of the *kropatschek* that beat upon them like hail. They fell to the ground, making the sand fly, and found voice then to cry out in shrill tones; they became mad with fear, and no longer knew how to use their lances, stupified by the rapidity of our firing. No, they had never imagined anything like it: rifles more frightful and working more mysteriously than the cannons of yesterday! Then they were

seized by that nameless terror of the incomprehensible, the fatality of things, against which one feels that there is nothing to be done, and the panic of defeat spread like fire in a train of powder.

They fled shrieking, knocking each other over in their narrow trench.

And the sailors, that little handful of men, fully excited now by the smoke, by the sun, by the sight of blood, ran in pursuit of them, up the sandhill.

In a few seconds they were at the top, before the fort. Some soldiers, with heads like Huns, guarding it behind the slope, had come out suddenly, like devils out of a box, and had fired in their faces. By one of those extraordinary chances that favoured us that morning, they wounded no one, and immediately fled in disorder, seized, too, by the contagion of fear.

Then the ship's lieutenant in command, still aided by the second mate, Jean Louis Balcon, had torn down the yellow flag of Annam, the black Mandarin flag, and hoisted in their place the flag of France. This fort was the culminating point of the peninsula; the little French flag was immediately seen from all around; from the shore and from the Squadron; the sailors, who were just then very excited, greeted it with shouts of joy. It was the first to float on this land of Tu-Duc; it was nothing, and yet it was a great deal—a sign of hope, visible there to the whole little troup of Frenchmen, and, for the others, the presage of defeat.

From the top of this fort to which all the men of the *Atalante* had rushed, one saw in the distance the whole of the landing corps, the detachment from the

Bayard, the artillery, the infantry of the marines, the indigenous *matas* massing themselves on the sandhills to begin their great uniform movement towards the forts on the south. This could all be seen with a glance of the eyes; but it was more especially necessary to watch those who had escaped from the trenches; they were hurrying down the other slope of the sand towards the interior and the great lagoon, but might at any given moment join forces again and return to the attack.

They had taken refuge on the left in a village which was there, at the foot of the fort. A village smiling in the sunshine with little white houses, speckled in the Chinese fashion; beautiful exotic trees and gardens full of flowers, and ancient pagodas whose walls were covered with many-coloured crockery and whose roofs bristled with monsters.

Oh! the unhappy refugees! A moment later, this village was in flames. A shell from the Squadron had fallen into the middle of it, right on to some straw-thatched cottages. Walls of painted planks, thin laths of bamboo, open-work partitions of Indian reed, the whole caught fire almost simultaneously, the flames going so quickly from house to house, one had not time to see them pass.

In the fresh blue light of the morning these flames looked extraordinarily red; they gave no light, they were dull like blood. One watched them writhe and mix and hasten to consume everything; the smoke, intensely black, diffusing a strong musty stench. On the roofs of the pagodas, among the devils, among all the outspread claws, all the forked tails, all the darts, it seemed at first natural

enough to see the leaping tongues of fire. But these little plaster monsters had begun to crackle and burst, throwing to right and left their scales of blue porcelain, and the crystal balls of their wicked eyes, then had sunk with the rafters, into the gaping holes of the temples.

It became difficult to hold the sailors back; they wanted to go down into the village, search under the trees, and put an end to these men of Tu-Duc. An unnecessary danger, for evidently the poor refugees would be forced to leave it and fly elsewhere, half singed and completely routed.

During this time, towards the south, the combined movement of the other French troops had been accelerated; there, as here, the enemy was in flight, and, one after another, the yellow flags of Annam fell. The great battery at the Rice Magazine was taken, the villages behind were burning with red flames and black smoke. One was astonished to see all these fires, to see how quickly and well everything was going, how the whole country was in flames. One had no more conscience for anything, and every feeling was absorbed in that astounding fever for destruction.

After all, in the Far East, to destroy is the first rule of warfare. Besides if you come with a little handful of men to impose your law on a great country, the enterprise is so adventurous, that it is necessary to excite terror, lest you yourself should succumb.

Now, into the midst of these sailors from the *Atalante*, who had remained on the top of the sandhills, having nothing more to do, an Annamite fort sent three well-directed bullets, which by a rare chance; traversed the

different groups without touching any one, the sailors hardly noticed them, so occupied were they in watching the rout at their feet on the hot sands, which was hastening to an end almost of itself.

In fact, they had not long to wait before the exodus of Tu-Duc's soldiers, escaping from the burning village, took place. Suddenly they were seen to emerge and collect on the outskirts of the houses, hesitating still, tucking their things well up in order to run the better, covering their heads for fear of bullets, with bits of planks, with mats, and osier shells—childish precautions, such as one would take against a shower. And then they started off at full speed. You could see some who were absolutely mad, running blindly like wounded creatures; they ran, this race of terror, in zigzags and cross-wise, tucking their things up to their hips in a comical way, their loosened chignons, and long hair making them look like women. Others jumped into the lagoon, covering their heads with fragments of osier and of straw, and tried to swim to the junks.

And in the smouldering village one saw burnt bodies in little heaps on the ground. Some were still moving: an arm, a leg stiffened itself out straight as it shrivelled, or one heard horrible cries.

Hardly nine o'clock in the morning, and all appeared to be over; the detachment from the *Bayard* and the infantry had just taken the circular fort over there to the South, containing more than a hundred cannon; its great yellow flag, the last, was on the ground, and on this side as well, the panic-stricken soldiers had leapt into the waters of the lagoons. In less than three hours the French

manœuvres had been carried out with surprising precision and success; the defeat of the King of Annam was accomplished.

The noise of the artillery, the dry sound of the great cannons had everywhere ceased; the ships of the Squadron were no longer fireing, but floated tranquilly on the blue water.

And then a crowd of men in white had swarmed up the masts; all the sailors on board had climbed into the rigging, facing towards land, and, waving their hats, shouted all together, "Hurrah." That was the end.

As noon approached the *Atalante* men had by degrees set in order the little fort that they were to occupy until the following day, by order of the Commander-in-Chief. They were overcome by heat, by nervous excitement and thirst. The red sandhills reflected the heat unbearably under the sun which was at its zenith; the dazzling light fell perpendicularly, and the shadows, thrown by the men standing, stopped short at their feet.

And this great country of Annam, that one could see on the other side of the lagoon, seemed an Eden with its high blue mountains, its cool wooded valleys. One thought of that immense town of Hué, which was behind the screens of verdure, scarcely defended now, and full of mysterious treasures. Of course we should go there to-morrow, and that would be the real affair.

The dinner hour had come, and all settled down as comfortably as it was possible to a meagre campaign repast of ship's rations. Fortunately, close at hand there was a portable cabin belonging to a military mandarin who had fled the day before: a vast cabin made of bamboo and

reeds in fine and elegant trellis-work, extremely light. It was brought up, with its cane benches, and its arm-chairs, and we sat down in it, well sheltered from the burning sun.

Sad surprise: the wine ran short, in spite of express orders from the Admiral and from the Captain of the *Atalante*. It was incomprehensible. . . However, one put a little more water in the canteens and dined very merrily all the same.

The men had picked up lances, chaplets of sapeques (Chinese money), and all sorts of garments. They had wound round their hips beautiful strips of different coloured materials. (Sailors always have a great liking for sashes). They put on the airs of conquerors and strutted under magnificent parasols, or played carelessly with fans as they warded off the flies.

With this shelter from the sun and the rest, their youthful heads grew cool again; the excitement over, they naively wondered how they could have been fighting and taking life so short a time ago.

One of them, hearing the groan of a wounded man outside, got up and made him drink the remainder of the wine and water from his own canteen.

The fire in the village had slowly burnt itself out; just a few little red flames were to be seen here and there amongst the black ruins. Three or four houses only, had not been burnt. Two pagodas were also left standing; another, nearest the fort, in burning out, had emitted a sweet perfume of balm and of incense.

The sailors now all left their shelter of bamboos, and though rather tired and blinded by the light, they wan-

dered about under the dangerous mid-day sun, looking for the wounded, to give them drink and rice; to place them more comfortably on the sand, or to lay them with their heads higher. They sought Chinese hats to put on their heads, and mats to give them a little protection from the heat. And the yellow men, who invent refined tortures for their prisoners, looked at them with dilated eyes full of wonder and gratitude. They signalled their thanks with poor trembling hands, and above all they dared to relieve themselves by groaning aloud, by giving vent to the mournful "Han! . . . Han! . . ." they had restrained since the morning, that they might appear to be dead.

Some of the corpses were already very dreadful. And great horseflies were devouring them.

Peace had settled everywhere.

Over there, towards the great south fort where the final round had been played this morning by the detachment from the *Bayard*, nothing was to heard either.

It was the headquarters of the Captain in command of the Expedition, and the fact that the firing had ceased there was proof enough that the day of action was officially at an end.

Some human heads now appeared in the lagoon from under the old capsized junks, looking to see if it were true that the fighting was really over before they ventured out—poor scared creatures, the last of the refugees who had hidden, suffocating in the water since the morning.

The heat was oppressive. Distant villages continued to burn in the silence. Nothing happened, but from time to time some death of an Annamite, some isolated episode to

break the stillness of the evening, and the monotony of the sun scorching down on the sands and on the dead.

A young Annamite soldier whose chest was pierced by a deep hole, was the first who dared to drag himself to the camp of the *Atalante*. Having heard how the others had been treated, he had come to beg for a little rice.

Then he had stretched himself almost at the feet of the lieutenant in command, guessing he would find protection, and unwilling to move.

With great care and precaution they had taken him away all the same, and had laid him elsewhere, on account of the repulsiveness of his wound: with every breath, air came out of the hole, causing a horrible liquid to bubble at the opening.

There was no ambulance, no "Cross of Geneva" in Annam. This was all that could be done for them: a little rice, a little cold water, a little shade—and at last leave them to die, turning away that one might not see.

5 o'clock.

A wounded man had got up suddenly, speaking very loud in a prophetic tone, as though he were saying things to the French that ought to be heard. Then they had sent the interpreter to him.

It was a terrible curse against the military mandarins who had taken to flight after having pushed them to battle, against the spirits of the pagodas who had not been able to protect them. He had further said that the spirits of the French were superior to those of Annam, and ended by asking for a little wine and sugar.

The glass emptied, his jaw had fallen with a sound like

a box opening, and he was dead, his hands still moving as though to make a last tchin-tchin.

One was hungry in spite of all, and it was neccessary to think of dining, before the night which comes so suddenly in these countries.

Then the boys of Saïgon had been sent for, who set to work at once to ferret in the village like wicked little thieving foxes. In a twinkling, they had found rice, plates, sauce-pans, drawn fresh water, caught and plucked some chickens. . . Everything that one asked for seemed to come like magic from their hands. Wonderful little servants indeed, they had even brought, for the two in charge of the fort, some beautiful blue hammocks of silken thread, as well as these great gilt armchairs in which those officers had sat down, like sovereigns in the declining light, beginning to review in their calmer state of mind the whole series of the day's events.

III.

And now that night has really come these scenes fade into a half-dream. One realizes that this will be a long night and wearisome to pass; one has no inclination to sleep.

That town of Hué, which is there, quite close at hand, only two hours' march away, though nothing reveals its presence, shut in by its high walls, begins in like manner to take fantastic shapes in the imagination. Shall we go there to-morrow? It seems probable. And no doubt we shall take possession of it as we did of Thouane-An, though there are forts along the road and bars in the river.

A town unique among towns; only one European ever penetrated it, a Missionary Bishop, sent for by the king when Hai-Phong was ceded. He gave some astonishing accounts:

Its gates are closed to all, even to the people of Annam, who only pass into its outer precincts under certain special circumstances—finding it still more difficult to leave than to enter.

It forms a perfect square, so extensive that it takes a man more than a day to walk round it, and is almost empty. Strangers, workmen, merchants, all who live there are lodged in the suburbs, outside its interminable walls. Inside it is nothing but the huge dwelling-place of a king who is invisible or perhaps dead.

Nothing but palaces, seraglios, parks and pagodas; and, no doubt, piled-up riches, that have lain untouched for centuries; no one but courtiers and mandarins—shadowy people who govern and oppress this old kingdom of dust.

Five concentric walled enclosures, containing, in proportion as you approach the centre, personages who are more and more important and more and more mysterious.

In the centre at last is the king, who has never been seen, enclosed as though in the depths of one of those series of Chinese boxes that fit one into another indefinitely. It sometimes happens, they say, that a guard of the palace, seized with an overwheming curiosity, will risk his life to catch a glimpse, through a door or an open window of this old kingly visage fatal as that of Medusa; for if he succeeds and is discovered his head is at once cut off.

This town, it appears, is protected by a charm. "When Europeans enter it," says an ancient proverb, "the heavens will fall."

It is well worth the risk of an attack, and the thought of the morrow pre-occupies the imagination.

8 o'clock in the evening.

It is time to make the first nocturnal patrol in the village; the detachments of artillery and infantry encamped there are under the authority of the fort.

The start is made with fully loaded arms. The patrol lantern, carried by a sailor, which lights the way is an exquisite little Chinese lamp of ancient workmanship, taken from a pagoda.

The patrol descends, often slipping on the sand. There

is a smell of burning; here is the village: red brasiers give out smoke of a horrible odour; grunting pigs poke their snouts amongst the rubbish and the dead; scared hens and guinea-fowl flutter in search of a roosting place. In spite of oneself one avoids the dark corners, one walks in the open for fear of the dead bodies.

Again that horrible "Han! Han!" that one had begun to forget—the sound of a hollow voice at the last gasp; and hands stretched out in supplication, endeavouring to do tchin-tchin. There are many on the ground who call out; one must stop to give them drink, and the canteens of the honest patrollers are soon emptied.

A great building has been left standing in which shadows appear to be moving round a fire: inside, gilded walls, a gilded roof, the vastness of a church and the magnificence of a seraglio. It was one of the King's pagodas. It is full of soldiers of the marine infantry who talk and smoke as they come and go; they burn up arm chairs of rare beauty, covered with a fine coating of lacquer and of gold, in order to cook their soup.

The night is dark and oppressive. More burnt houses and dead bodies. Formless heaps; half-scorched heads trying to raise themselves; hands that move. The little Chinese lamp throws light on all this in passing . . .

And then another pagoda, a smaller one, apparently very old; an antique curiosity with a confusion of devils on the roof, and of grinning china monsters at the entrance.

Buddhas of jasper, broken gods and goddesses in gilded wood lie about near the door, legs in the air, and headless; many have, no doubt, been taken away, and

these appear to be the remains after a hasty selection. There is a fire at the further end, burning badly enough; its light dances on the ancient gildings, on the mother-of-pearl inscriptions, and on the china figures; it is the kitchen of four soldiers who are occupied in boiling a pig. Several editions of the mystic group of the Heron and the Tortoise are lying on the ground; and one of these great herons is even burning under the saucepan amongst other remains of sculpture, lying across the fire, with its stiff red lacquered paws, and its gilded back.

The four men who are there laugh loudly, exchange suburban jokes with a bad Parisian accent; one would guess that they were keepers of the barrier gates whom chance has collected round this supper.

A little further on some others have picked up a tiny little girl, a baby four or five years old, slightly wounded on the leg. They have dressed the wound and have laid her down as comfortably as possible, and are watching her with the utmost solicitude. She is sleeping with perfect trust in the midst of them; her eyes sloping towards the temples give her the look of a little Toodie cat, very sweet and winsome.

They had first laid her down quite naked, so that she should be more at her ease in the great heat; but they have just decided, in consultation, that they must cover her stomach lest she should get the colic from the dampness of the night; and one amongst them gives his sash.

Poor little forsaken thing, what can they do with her? They will not be allowed to take her with them; what is to become of her, all alone, when they have gone?

Now we must go back to the fort; to sit in the great

gilded arm-chairs or lie down in the blue hammocks which the boys have slung,—the chairs, most probably, to keep a better look out.

The night grows darker and darker. One feels that one is on an elevated plain because of the stretches of darkness everywhere, with the distant fires of the camps and burning houses.

The sailors have behaved very well. Many have already gone to lie down quietly in the house of the military mandarin. Others are sitting up, silently and thoughtfully, heart-broken at having had to charge with the bayonet, at seeing blood on their linen clothes, and waiting impatiently for the morning to go and wash it out "in soft water."

Some want to have supper already, from mere childishness, having scarcely recovered from their ample dinner; they have made another raid in the direction of a certain pool of water where all the chickens and ducks, that escaped the fire, have collected for a last conventicle of their feathered kind. They have put a dozen to boil, with a young pig, in an enormous saucepan on a bamboo fire.

An explosion and everything is scattered! The saucepan jumps into the air, flies into pieces; the sauce falls in rain. In order to discover the cause of the explosion, they examine the remaining bamboos, which had been taken, shortly before, from the mandarin's house; they are powder cases, full to the brim. It makes them laugh; then they go and lie down for the night.

The silence increases, and the sound of the breakers on the shore begins to be heard.

From time to time, "bang, bang, bang, bang," as the

boys of Saïgon say: a scared sentinel, half asleep, who thinks he hears footsteps, has fired hasty shots on some phantom of his dream.

Or else a sepulchral groan rises from below the walls; always the "Han! Han! . . ." prolonged to a heart-rending moan; some Annamite dying. One stops one's ears in order not to hear.

There must be a great swell out at sea this evening, for the noise of the breakers grows louder. Already this morning the boats had difficulty in reaching the shore; to-night it would be quite impossible, and, in case of a surprise, or a defeat, there would be no means of getting back to the ships.

One listens with something of melancholy to the dull grumbling of the waves that now cut off all communication with the squadron and the European world, remembering how small a number of men hold the place by force of terror. And it seems strange in thinking of it that one should have come in this impudent way to encamp in the middle of an immense country, surrounding oneself with the dead by way of inspiring fear.

8-30 p.m.

A flash of light, a great noise that makes one start up: a cannon-shot from the village below. "Turn out!" one shouts: "Stand to arms!"

It is only the scouts who thought they had seen the outlines of some great junks appear in the middle of the lagoon, on the glossy surface of the water.

After all, perhaps they are coming to negotiate.

They are no longer seen. All is silent again.

9 o'clock.

At the same point several junks appear one after the other, suddenly illuminated by a bright fire with long tongues of flame that burns in front of one of them.

Once again turn out and stand to arms! These junks come from the mainland, from the direction of Hué.

Then they stop: there is the white flag of truce above the fire, lit there no doubt to make it plainly visible. It is necessary to go down to the shore with the interpreter to receive this embassy, and give the order to the sentinels to allow them to land.

They approach slowly, these junks, as though hesitating with fear: they arrive, with their effect of Venetian gondolas, carrying high their central dome and their arched points. They move noiselessly, propelled by a single oar from behind, with that little fluttering motion peculiar to this method of progression. A voice that sounds very French, asks:

"Will you receive the envoys from the court of Hué, who come to sue for peace?"

We answer:

"Yes."

And they come ashore. Improvised torches, pieces of flaring wood, throw light on the landing of these strange people. First the guards of the court of Annam, clothed in sombre blue, with large collars bordered with white.

They certainly seem rather numerous for a simple embassy, but it is probably a matter of etiquette, and besides they are unarmed.

Then great sumptuous litters of gold are seen to emerge, ending in grotesque faces; and parasols of gold open in

the darkness, and baldachins, and hammocks . . . It seems an unpacking of fairyland.

All these things are arranged methodically on the sand. The guards raise the golden litters to their shoulders, hang the blue hammocks on them and then cover them with baldachins and with curtains—in all, four complete sedans —into which mount with an air of mystery, some personages whom one cannot see. Four bearers of parasols rush forward as though to protect them from imaginary rays, and at last the procession advances. With a silent retinue it moves towards the man who in their eyes represents war, invasion, terror: the ship's lieutenant in command of the fort.

He stands waiting, about a hundred paces off, near a fire that has been stirred up to give more light. He is in campaining attire, dusty and torn, and soiled with earth and smoke, and feels not a little amused at so ceremonious an embassy.

Two paces from him the first parasol is lowered, the first sedan stops, and the curtains are drawn aside. . . .

IV.

One expected to see some great Asiatic personage descend. But no, it is a European head, very pale, that raises itself up from the hammock fringed with blue; the voice, which is absolutely French, has that gentle and rather unctuous drawl peculiar to Church functionaries; the man is clothed in a violet cassock; the pastoral ring glistens on his finger, and he first holds out his hand, to receive a kiss which is not bestowed.

"Sir, I am the Missionary Bishop of Hué. I accompany the envoys. Will you receive the King's minister?"

At the same time, the arm of one of the invisible personages partly draws aside the curtains of the second sedan and presents a letter on which the address is written in French and in a very flowing handwriting (the Bishop's, no doubt):

"To the Civil Commissioner General, or, in his absence, to the Rear-Admiral, Commander-in-Chief."

Assurance is given to his Eminence that he will be treated with the utmost regard, he and those whom he accompanies. But he is warned, at the same time, that the laws of warfare, as also of simple prudence, make it necessary to conduct him to the fort under an armed escort; there he will be courteously guarded till the return of the junior officer who is going to headquarters (the South fort) to bring back superior orders.

Then, at a given sign, a band of sailors surrounds the

entire embassy, and the procession, resuming its march in the light of the torches, begins in dead silence to climb the steep slope of the sands.

These torches, from time to time, light up dead bodies that lie across the road, half buried in the sand, their hands in the air, or a dying man who utters his horrible groan as loud as he can, stretching out his arms towards the soldiers of the court. But these pass on without daring to turn round, trembling and stupefied by fear.

They halt at the top, in the little camp of the *Atalante*.

Then all the golden parasols are lowered and the bearers bend down. The curtains of the sedans shake as though they were about to be drawn; the invisible personages are going to appear; and the sailors, curious to see their faces, form a circle about, stirring up the bamboos, that they may see better.

First the bishop, who puts his feet painfully to the ground, assuming an attitude of languor. Next his vicar alights. And at last the two Annamite personages, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State.

These two are trembling perceptibly, and press close to the Bishop.

They are attired with extreme simplicity, in Chinese tunics, uniformly black, fastened with loops and buttons of pink jasper; they wear thin, pointed little beards,—like Attila; and their hair, long as a woman's, is carelessly put up in an old-fashioned chignon at the nape of the neck. They are both very distinguished in their whole appearance; with refined faces, small patrician hands and marvellous nails pointed like claws.

The Prime Minister leans on the shoulder of a strange

courtier, of ambiguous sex, who had rushed forward to help him descend: clothed in black like his master, his hair parted in the middle into two very long braids, he has a slight and elegant figure, and an effeminate and pretty face. One would say at first it was a young girl in man's clothes. But apparently it is a boy.

Then one thinks of those "Asiatic children" whom the refined classes of the Lower Roman Empire used to have brought them at great cost, and whom they attached to their persons as things of fashion and luxury. Doubtless the unprogressive Far East, so old before our era began, has not changed since the Roman epoch.

The boys of Saïgon who are themselves "Asiatic children," would be very useful now in improvising—raising out of the ground a presentable supper for the envoys, who seem overcome by their emotions and the journey. But they are no longer here. They were sent out of the sailors' camp at nightfall, by order, and have gone away to sleep no one knows where. A little wine and water, and some tea and rice, is all that we can offer to the Prime Minister and to the bishop.

Now the two priests, the two French officers and the two Annamite grandees, with the "Asiatic child" at their feet, are quietly seated, like friends, on the military mandarin's light benches.

The conversation begins, rather slowly with some embarrassment. The Bishop acts as interpreter, and his drawling voice denotes excessive fatigue. He tells of the consternation that reigns in Hué, the stupor, the contagious fear caused by our enormous cannon, our far-carrying musketry, and our rapid firing.

And then he adds, in a lower tone, that his rôle as Bishop is naturally quite official. In coming this evening, he had merely ceded to the solicitations of the Court of Annam; the terror was such that, without him the envoys would not have dared to present themselves in the French Camp.

The silent retinue of the embassy has established itself in the middle of the fort enclosure; courtiers and simple guards sitting pell-mell on the sand, leaning against one another, overwhelmed, as though with the approach of their last hour. And the magnificant sedans lying on the ground, the gilding of the great parasols, give the Asiatic note to these mute groups.

The night is less dark; the heavy clouds, which at sunset had hung like a velarium, begin to break, leaving clear spaces full of stars.

The sailors, who had all wakened up to see the sedans and the procession arrive, are now seated around on the low walls of the fort; they smoke and talk in undertones. Over their heads can be seen the dark stretches of the heaven, grown so tranquil with the coming of night. In the distance, towards the west, there are still the red braziers, all that remains of the villages. To the east, the Chinese sea—a great unbroken plain that looks like bluish marble; begins to glisten here and there, reflecting the spaces of stars above.

Once again the "Han! . . . Han! . . ." rises up from the shore in a horribly prolonged moan. Yet another dying! In spite of oneself one is silent while the groan lasts, and the men of Annam shudder.

And then on the edge of the horizon one sees the great red

disc of the moon, spreading her luminous trail over the immensity of the waters. In a minute it will be quite light.

Little by little, among the group of envoys, the conversation becomes more animated, more cordial. The Minister offers his long Annamite cigarettes, rolled into thin wafers, which he has brought ready made in a little coffer; he appears to gain confidence when he sees that they are accepted.

The language of the country seems to be a succession of uncertain, nasal consonants, cut up into somewhat halting monosyllables, amongst which, at short intervals, something like the *miaoo* of a cat recurs. Yet it all appears to have a signification, for the Bishop translates a host of very graceful things that the poor vanquished ones feel obliged to say.

Towards 10.30, the Captain of the frigate L—— arrives from the South fort, announcing the receipt of the letter of truce and bringing the superior orders: the Ambassador and the Bishop are to repair at once to Headquarters, bringing their secretaries with them if they choose; as to the men of their retinue, they are to remain in the *Atalanta* fort, under the supervision of the lieutenant in command, who is requested to make them lie down surrounded by his sailors.

Quickly the beautiful litters are raised, the hammocks and curtains arranged; the four personages take their leave, and their sedans move off to the quick and measured step of the bearers. The moon, which is still low, throws a warm light upon them; we watch them disappear in the distance over the pink sands, still with their golden parasols and their look of beings from out of fairyland.

In the encampment there is a general movement and preparation for settling down to sleep.

But the yellow men are frightened now that the Bishop and their chief have gone. Before lying down amongst the sailors, they want to cement their friendship with them, to assert it by a thousand amicable proofs. They go through long forms of politeness, Annamite bows of every description, ceremonious chin-chins with joined hands, shakings of the hand that are endless. And the sailors, greatly impressed by these beautiful manners, return the salutations and the handshakes, whilst stifling their desire to laugh; they are very much astonisned to meet with such obsequious courtiers, and to feel their long nails.

Before midnight, every one is more or less housed, lying down, and asleep—the sentinels excepted.

The two officers, still in the mandarin chairs, are not asleep yet either.

In vain the moon sheds forth her beautiful, clear light, clouds disperse and the heavens become pure and splendid again, nothing can lessen the gloom of this night of vigil. The smoke of the burning villages can be distinguished as plainly as in daylight; on the shining sands, the bodies of the dead form black patches—in the shape of a cross when the arms are extended. And the continued noise of the breakers produces that feeling of isolation, of being cut off from the rest of the world, in this land of Annam.

Then, suddenly the horrible "Han ! . . . Han ! . . ." is heard again, and this time it seems to come from somewhere close at hand, from the ground, almost from under the chairs, and at the same instant real arms stretch out

towards us, and try to embrace our knees . . . It is the wounded man of last night, the poor fellow with the pierced chest, who has come back again, who has dragged himself along and presented himself here, God knows how!

We dare not have him removed this time; we give him a covering, some wine to drink, and everything he wants; but it is provoking that he should insist on coming back; since nothing can be done to save him, he had better die at once.

The air is heavy, and the wind hot; there is a sweet, enervating scent of tropical plants and sandhill flowers with a scent of other things as well, a mixture, at the same time fetid and musky, which is peculiar to the villages, and the people, and everything of this country. The sailors say: "It smells Chinese," and it cannot be better expressed. That is it exactly: "It smells Chinese," which is characteristic and indefinable.

. . . Suddenly a first whiff of cemetery air mixes itself with these other strange odours . . . The corpses are beginning to grow obnoxious! . . . Indeed, they should have been removed before nightfall; it ought to have been thought of at sunset, when the first black birds were seen to collect. But one counted on making the prisoners do this business in the morning, one had no idea that decomposition would set in so quickly.

. . . A second whiff arises, sickening, horrible . . . it will certainly grow rapidly worse before morning, and become intolerable. What is to be done? . . . Wake the sailors, who are already so tired? . . . One hesitates between the horror of going to move the dead

bodies at night, and the dreadful discomfort that their vicinity causes. A lassitude nails you to the spot; till a kind of troubled sleep comes at last, full of dreams, haunted by the contortions, the grimaces, and the dreadful writhings of the dead. . . .

V.

The day of August 21st.

At six o'clock the sun is there, flooding the land simultaneously with brilliant light and extreme heat as it rises. Then the visions of the night evaporate, and things resume their true proportions.

The tent where one has slept is filled with sunbeams. The gilded poles and the pagoda lances that sustain the hangings, glitter; but the hangings are soiled and sordid.

Outside, the whole camp is waking. The Annamites, in stretching, sigh as they remember their defeat and the terrors of yesterday. They shake their blue gowns—that are spoilt—twist up their long hair and re-arrange their chignons like women. Several fires are already lighted on the sand. The sailors must needs set again to cooking their chickens at the first sign of daybreak.

Down below, the land of Annam looks very beautiful, and rather strange at this early hour. The violet peaks of the high mountains stand out clearly in the sky; they seem to be more jagged than is natural, as in a landscape that might have been painted by the Chinese. The wooded plains are of that fresh and brilliant tint, which is peculiar to the Tropics. And the mirador of Hué—that of the Royal Palace—can be seen, dominating the green distances . . .

The wounded man with the pierced chest has died in the night; he is stretched out stiffly, open-mouthed in the sun. All round the fort, of course, there are still the dead bodies in the same positions as last night. And, as though there were not enough, the sea has even washed up those that were thrown into it yesterday; they are all along the shore, washed by the white spray of the waves, still with their hands in the air—and all swollen, looking like great big-bellied baboons. It will certainly be necessary to dig vast holes to bury so many bodies.

Will there be a march on Hué to-day—will its great, mysterious walls be scaled?—Doubtless not; that embassy which came last night will have signed anything rather than see us enter the town and palaces,—the old proverb of Annam will be right once again.

Close round the camp there is nothing but the hot sparkling sand, contrasting with the green border of the interior; and then the ruins and remains of all that the fire destroyed yesterday. Two pagodas still standing, show with an evil look their horns and claws and whole array of earthenware devils. And the cocoa-nut trees in the village that were so fresh, have turned black; they are planted in the midst of all this waste like scorched old feather-brooms.

Towards seven o'clock the distant noise of a fusilade. It is the French troops encamped in the Circular Fort who have just crossed the river Hué in the Squadron's small boats, and are advancing on the sands of the south bank. Through the telescope one can follow the distant movements of these rows of little black pigmies who are seamen and soldiers; one can see them take possession,

without striking a blow, of two or three forts that the enemy abandoned in yesterday's great panic—and the tricolor is hoisted everywhere.

That must be the end of it all, and doubtless there will be no more fighting.

An oppressive day, long, monotonous, excessively hot and painful to get through.

The dead are being buried. There are more than one had realized. The Annamite official report reckons twelve hundred, and that is about the number. They are thrown altogether into great holes. The prisoners perform this duty, guarded by the serjeants of the native troops of Saïgon with pointed bayonets.

The seamen, who are very thirsty to-day, draw water from the cisterns; but it is muddy water, and what is more, it is musky like everything in this country. The prisoners explain that it has been brought from the mainland in bottles of goat skin from which it gets the smell, and that nevertheless it has a very good flavour.

Still, for fear of poison, the sailors decide to filter it. And now the great chinese hats—which have already made splendid funnels for pouring the wine into the canteens—are again in requisition. (The sand is strewn with them, with these great conical hats in the forms of lamp shades, dropped there during the rout.) They put some pounded charcoal in the bottom, and then fill them up with water, and soon, from the point, a little clear stream runs out which is not bad to drink.

3 o'clock in the afternoon.

The embassy once more comes to camp, on its return

from headquarters. It passes on without stopping, picks up its escort, descends with gymnastic strides towards the lagoon, and embarks in the junks. And throughout this rapid march, the great Asiatic parasols, speckled with gold, turn, rise or fall, following the rays of the sun, manipulated with rare precision by their bearers.

This time the sedans remain closed. The Bishop alone pushed aside his curtains to wave his hand and announce that the Treaty of peace had been accepted with its hardest clauses: they are hastening as much as possible to take it this same evening for the signature of the King of Annam. . . .

So the old proverb is true, and the great walls of Hué will keep their mystery. . .

The wind is decidedly in a peaceful quarter. At sunset, two mandarins arrive at the fort, trembling a little, but eager and obsequeous, with an air of profoundest humility, making fine chin-chins, shaking hands with everyone, an operation in which the folds of their pagoda sleeves and the length of their nails come rather in the way.

Their robes are of ultramarine silk gauze, brocaded with a large rose pattern. The fronts of a paler blue, like those waistcoats worn by fashionable women in France.

They have come to bring us a supply of cattle, of pigs and bananas, and fresh water, all kinds of good things that will be very welcome.

They also bring sensational news: it would seem that the King in person, the invisible, the unknowable, went up yesterday into his great mirador that one can see over there, to watch the bombardment and the Squadron. It is true that rigorous threats of death had been spread in

the town against whoever should dare to raise his eyes towards this tower; and all the houses, all the windows had been closed in terror. But from the great suburbs inhabited by Europeans and merchants, he could have been seen through glasses, and this fact is really a sign of the times, a thing without precedent in the history of Annam.

9 o'clock in the evening.

The order arrives from headquarters to re-embark the marines to-morrow in the early morning. . .

It is over, this little dream of conquest. The forts will be left in charge of the Marine Infantry and of the *Vipère*.

The seamen, greatly disappointed, wander about the burnt village, to pick up amongst the rubbish a thousand little souvenirs that they wish to take away with them; with the help of lanterns they make an extraordinary choice from amongst the remains, lamenting greatly that they had not been warned earlier, that they had not been able to select it all by daylight. They only go to sleep very late, when they have prepared their little bundles and sung several songs.

VI.

August the 22nd.

Towards eight o'clock on a glorious morning the heavily-laden boats that are bringing the sailors with their arms and baggage back over the glittering sea, reach the ships of the Squadron.

The others, the less fortunate, those who had remained on board, wait near the bulwarks to see the return: the men come on board with the air of conquerors, displaying their beautiful sashes, wearing Chinese hats, carrying lances, yellow flags or black ones at the end of gilded poles; they are deeply sunburnt, one and all, and dying of thirst. . . .

And then, some have picked up tea-pots in old China ware, flowery plates, buddhas, or mystic herons, birds of the pagodas perched on tortoises,

And others, the practical and greedy, have brought back fowls in cages, to be cooked on board—even little live pigs slung in shoulder belts across the back, fastened by their paws and shrieking horribly.

There is much rejoicing over this great and rapid success; the news of the doubtful days in the north—on the banks of the Red river—has not reached us yet, and we imagine that peace will at once be signed, followed by our departure, and return to France. At supper different

dishes, not provided by the rule, circulate at the tables of the crew, with wines that come from the officers' quarters. And on the stroke of nine a procession is even organized and marches past, the men stooping low as they go under the hammocks. Then those who are already asleep, wake up with a start, and lean over, scared to see what is passing under them:—great pointed hats, a procession of Chinamen! . . . some in mandarin dresses of official cut, in black silk, too tight often and split at the shoulders; others quite naked, simply carrying a lance, a mystic heron, or a buddha to give a proper effect.

Not a single death to regret, no one missing at the roll call, not an empty place;—thus it all ends in gaiety and fun.

And to-morrow the Squadron is to separate in order to fulfil the several duties of re-victualling and of blockade.

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